Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women



Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Report

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COMMISSIONERS, STAFF AND INTERNS

Remarks from the Chair



On behalf of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, it is my pleasure to present our FY2015 Annual Report. We took meaningful steps forward in fulfilling our mission of being a permanent effective voice for women from across the 351 cities and towns. We held four statewide public hearings; collaborated in the drafting of the Equal Pay bill and have been

engaged in advocacy on behalf of other priority legislation; inaugurated a new regional women's commission in the MetroWest region; continued to support the five existing CSWs; celebrated our fourth Annual Advocacy Day with more than 100 individuals from across the Commonwealth; co-hosted Equal Pay Day with the Caucus of Women Legislators; and honored 90 community Unsung Heroines from across the Commonwealth. We are grateful for the investment and partnership of the administration, legislators and allied organizations, as we work together to advance the status of women throughout the Commonwealth. We look forward to working with an ever expanding network of individuals and organizations focused on closing gaps for women and girls.

Victoria A. Budson

Commissioners

Victoria A. Budson, Chair, Wellesley
Mary-dith E. Tuitt, Vice-Chair, Boston
Margot Parrot, Secretary, Athol
Mary K. Kassler, Treasurer, Brookline
Linda Cavaioli, Recent past chair, Worcester

Hanishi Thanawalla Ali, Westborough
Tahirah Amatul-Wadud, Chicopee
Dawne Armistead, Winthrop
Penny Blaisdell, Marblehead
Sheila Capone-Wulsin, Lowell
Chris Chanyasulkit, Brookline
Maureen Curley, Medford
Rebecca Donham, Holliston
Marianne Fleckner, Westford
Joanne Fitzgerald McCrea, Salem
Laurie Giardella, Nahant
Elizabeth Hart, Malden
Denise Hurst, Springfield
Marcia Huttner, Wayland
Ellen Quinn, Brookline

Staff

Jill Ashton, Director
Kelly Lynch, Outreach Coordinator

Interns

Sapana Anand

Isabel Brown

Caroline Charendoff

Gaby Germanos

Jen Healy

Melanie Kirsh

Annie Leiter

Erica Pedersen

Liz Rabideau

Kyera Sterling

Louisa Stone

Becky Tuvsanaa

INTRODUCTION

Mission

The mission of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women (MCSW) is to provide a permanent, effective voice for women across Massachusetts.

Charges

Under MA Chapter 3, Section 66 of the Massachusetts General Laws the MCSW is empowered to:

- Study, review and report on the status of women in the Commonwealth
- Advise executive and legislative bodies on the effect of proposed legislation on women
- Inform leaders of business, education, health care, state and local governments and the communications media of issues pertaining to women
- Provide referrals and serve as a resource of information on issues pertaining to women
- Identify and recommend qualified women for positions at all levels of government
- Promote and facilitate collaboration among local women's commissions and among women's organizations in the state
- Serve as a liaison between government and private interest groups concerned with issues affecting women

Organization

The Commission is comprised of 19 members who are appointed by the Governor, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Caucus of Women Legislators. Commissioners serve in a voluntary capacity and the work of the Commission is facilitated by two part-time staff members who are assisted by year-round interns. The full Commission meets monthly, except in July and August.

The full Commission meets monthly, except in July and August, as does the MCSW Executive Committee. In addition, each commissioner is a member of at least one standing committee that generally meets monthly. The standing committees are as follows:

Legislative and Public Policy Committee
Program and Planning Committee
Budget and Personnel Committee

This 2014-2015 Annual Report includes the Commission's activities and findings for the period of July 2014 to June 2015.

2015 RECOMMENDATIONS TO APPOINTING AUTHORITIES

In accordance with the responsibilities of the MCSW under MA Chapter 3, Section 66 of the Massachusetts General Laws, the MCSW submits the following recommendations for action to our appointing authorities:

Support legislation that addresses the issue of women's self sufficiency

Passage of An Act to Establish Equal Pay (S.983, H.1733) would help to eliminate the wage gap by clarifying terminology in the existing law to effectively implement equal pay for comparable work, establishing pay transparency and promoting fairness in hiring and practices around wages. Women who work full time earn approximately 80.8% of what men who work full time earn, and lose a combined total of approximately \$12,239,814,352 annually due to the wage gap. The wage gap, magnified over the course of a lifetime of earnings, can have a serious impact on the economic security of women and their families. Passing this type of legislation would be a strong step towards pay equity in the Commonwealth.

In addition to eliminating the wage gap in Massachusetts, ending gender discrimination in disability insurance policies (H.1867) is a key component of establishing women's full self-sufficiency. Women face unnecessary financial burdens when purchasing individual disability insurance. As one of the only two types of insurance in the state that can legally charge women more than men, disability insurance providers often charge women 25% to 75% more than their male counterparts. This is blatant gender discrimination and a direct violation of the Massachusetts Equal Rights Amendment.

Guaranteeing family and medical leave (H.1718) is another important step toward establishing self-sufficiency for women. Despite the universality of serious personal or family medical emergencies, most MA families face losing their jobs to care for themselves, their families or children during these times, particularly in low-income and single parent households. This harsh reality disproportionately affects women as they tend to be the primary caretakers of the family and are increasingly the primary bread winners.

Continue the establishment of regional commissions on the status of women

The Commission supports and is invested in the further establishment of county and regional commissions on the status of women. The Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (S.1080) and the Hampshire/Franklin Counties Commission on the Status of Women (H.1867) would be created in the same model as the MCSW, and the six existing county and regional commissions. The creation of the Hampden and Hampshire/Franklin Commissions is consistent with the Commission's goal of increasing women's political participation in the Commonwealth.

Support legislation that supports reproductive health and sexuality education

The Commission envisions a healthy, well-informed population of youth across the Commonwealth, and sees An Act Relative to Healthy Youth (H448) as a vital component of that end goal. This bill sets a standard benchmark for health education and states that any Massachusetts public schools that decide to provide their students with sexuality education must select a comprehensive, medically accurate, and ageappropriate curriculum.

MCSW BUDGET

Commission on the Status of Women BUDGET FY14		
	FY14 GAA	
Total Income from State Appropriation	\$71,500	
Expenses		
Salaries	\$46,500	
Operating Expenses	\$25,000	
Total Francisco	¢71 F00	
Total Expenses	\$71,500	

In FY10, the Commission's budget was reduced by 73% (from \$250,000 in FY2009). After this significant budget cut, the Commission was level funded for several years until it received an increase in its budget to \$100,000 in FY14. This increase has been applied to staff salaries, which has allowed the Commission to expand its reach and to more effectively communicate with and support the regional commissions. As a result, more information is being collected about the issues that women are facing. There are now six regional commission that report to the MCSW annually and work in partnership to host regional public hearings across the state. This growth allows the Commission to form a more comprehensive image of the status of women in the Commonwealth.

Moving forward, the Commission plans to submit a request to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means for an increase in its budget to \$140,00. This would allow the Commission to more effectively carry out its mission and better serve the women of Massachusetts. To put this budget increase in perspective, it must be noted that in 2001, when it was first established, the Commission operated on a budget of \$195,000, the level at which the Legislature deemed appropriate in order for the Commission to properly execute its charges. Given the Commission's record of achievement with limited resources, an increase to \$140,000 would provide a significant and expediential opportunity in its goals to provide a permanent and effective voice for women of the Commonwealth.

PROGRAMS AND ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

Public Hearings

In keeping with its mandate to study and report on the status of women and girls living in the Commonwealth, the Commission holds regional public hearings to hear the concerns of women. Area legislators and public officials are invited to attend. The Commission uses hearing testimony to shape and influence its legislative advocacy work and its annual recommendations to the appointing authorities.



The Commission held four public hearings during FY 15:

Holyoke Public Hearing, Holyoke Community College, October 22, 2014

Key issues raised at this hearing included:

Access to safe, affordable housing; Housing discrimination; Domestic violence; Reproductive choice; Pay equity; Teen pregnancy; Therapy abuse; Bullying; Sexual assault; Protecting pregnant workers; Increasing number of women in public offices; Access to affordable health services; Developing leadership opportunities for girls

Southbridge Public Hearing, Jacob Edwards Library, February 26, 2015

Key issues raised at this hearing included:

Access to interpretation service and affordable ESL classes; Support for grandparents raising grandchildren; Domestic violence; Mental health parity; Increasing numbers of women in public offices; Sex education; Access to transportation; Student debt

Haverhill Public Hearing, YWCA of Haverhill, March 25, 2015

Key issues raised at this hearing included:

Domestic violence; Protecting survivors in family court; Access to information about affordable healthcare and cancers that affect women; Language barriers in healthcare and educational institutions; Increasing awareness about substance abuse in community; Increasing socio-economic mobility for women of color

Attleboro Public Hearing, Attleboro Public Library, April 15, 2015

Key issues raised at this hearing included:

Affordable housing; Domestic violence; Access to childcare vouchers and transportation; Implementing graduated decreases in public benefit system; Sexual assault; Cultural and economic barriers for immigrant women; Equal pay; Increasing minimum wage; Access to financial literacy education

Full hearing reports are available in the appendix.

County and Regional Women's Commissions

Modeled after the MCSW, the six unfunded county and regional women's commissions were legislatively created to study and report on the status of women and girls in their geographical areas, and to provide permanent and effective voices for women and girls. Each county and regional commission reports their findings annually to MCSW.

Once the legislation has passed to establish a county or regional commission, MCSW solicits and reviews commissioner applications,

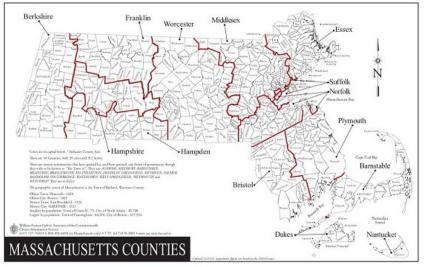
makes appointments, hosts a formal inaugural event to have the new commissioners sworn in, and conducts an opening session.

After the initial appointments have been made and the opening session conducted, MCSW continues to offer significant support to the commissions and oversees the appointments and reappointments of commissioners. MCSW frequently convenes with regional commissions in order to maintain strong partnerships and build the capacity of regional commissions.

The Commission has endorsed proposed legislation to establish a Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, and a Hampshire/Franklin Counties Commission on the Status of Women (see Legislation and Public Policy section). These new commissions would function in the same way as the four existing county and regional women's commissions.

Current Regional Commissions

- Berkshire County Commission on the Status of Women, 9 members from Berkshire County, established in 2005
- Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women, 9 members from Bristol County, established in 2008
- Cape Cod and Islands Commission on the Status of Women, 13 total members from Barnstable, Dukes, and Nantucket Counties, established in 2009
- Essex County Commission on the Status of Women, 9 members from Essex County, established in 2010
- Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women, 9 members from Worcester County, established in 2013
- MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women, represents the towns of Ashland, Bellingham, Dover, Framingham, Franklin, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Maynard, Medfield, Medway, Millis, Natick, Needham, Norfolk, Northborough, Norwood, Sherborn, Southborough, Stow, Sudbury, Walpole, Wayland, Wellesley, Westborough, Weston, and Wrentham, and the city of Marlborough, established in 2015



Local Women's Commissions

There are currently nine local Women's Commissions that represent various cities and towns in the Commonwealth. While these Commissions are independent of MCSW, the Commission serves as a resource and partner for local commissions and maintains contact with them on a regular basis.

Local commissions include: Boston Women's
Commission; Brockton Mayor's Commission on
Women's Issues; Brookline Commission for Women;
Cambridge Commission on the Status of Women;
Newton Commission on the Status of Women; Quincy
Mayor's Commission on Women; Somerville
Commission for Women; Springfield Commission for
Women; and Worcester City Manager's Advisory
Committee on the Status of Women.

Research

Per its enabling legislation the Commission is empowered to study, review, and report on the status of women in the Commonwealth, as well as advise executive and legislative bodies on the effect of proposed legislation on women.

The MCSW is interested in research that examines and reports on the state of women's lives across the Commonwealth. In the past, we have partnered with various separate agencies that focus on this type of research.

Over the course of the year, the Commission's staff utilizes information gathered from hearings to inform potential research topics, as well as the compilation of outside research.

Twelfth Annual "Unsung Heroines of Massachusetts" Program

On June 17, the MCSW hosted its twelfth Annual Unsung Heroine Celebration at the State House. This event honored 90 Heroines from cities and towns across the Commonwealth. The Unsung Heroines are women who, without fanfare or recognition, make the Commonwealth a better place to work and live.

The Commission partners with state legislators to identify women who perform significant acts of service on behalf of their communities. The nomination process identifies women of all ages, economic, political, geographic and ethnic backgrounds. All of the Unsung Heroine honorees were honored at a State House ceremony where they received appreciation from a grateful Commonwealth.



MCSW Internship Program

Preparing the next generation of leaders remains an important component for the Commission. As an extension of this commitment MCSW offers internship opportunities to students from universities and colleges across the country. Internships, both for credit and non-credit, are extended during fall semester, spring semester, and through the summer. During the 2014-2015 academic year, the Commission hosted 12 interns.

ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION

Fourth Annual Advocacy Day

On May 14, 2015 the MCSW hosted its fourth annual Advocacy Day at the State House. The public was invited to hear from state and county commissioners as well as elected officials regarding the status of women in Massachusetts and their access to equality and opportunities. Over 100 community members joined to visit with legislators and learn about the importance of considering gender when developing policy.



International Women's Day 2015

On March 6, 2014 the MCSW hosted the annual International Women's Day Breakfast at Simmons College with over thirty organizations in attendance. The commission was proud to serve as a member, with eighteen other organizations of the IWD planning board in order to guarantee the success of the event. This year's breakfast specifically focused on women's pay equity, with an emphasis on moving women's wages forward, both locally and globally.

Equal Pay Day

The purpose of Equal Pay Day is to raise awareness of the wage gap that exists between men and women. Equal Pay Day marks the day to which women must work in order to earn the same amount that their male colleagues made in the previous year. On April 14, 2014, the MCSW, along with the Caucus of Women Legislators, hosted an event at the State House featuring MCSW Chairwoman Victoria A. Budson, who spoke to the importance of equal pay, equality, and the positive effect that pay equity has on the economy. Equal Pay Day also served as a platform to advocate for An Act Relative to Comparable Work (H3883).



Disparities Action Network

The Disparities Action Network (DAN) is a statewide coalition of advocates, researchers, providers and institutions that work to reduce health disparities in the Commonwealth through legislative advocacy and education. Founded at Health Care for All in 2006, the DAN represents over 60 statewide organizations focused on addressing the complex issues that underlie health inequality. Commissioner Chanyasulkit attends and represents MCSW at DAN meetings. Currently, DAN's legislative priority is An Act to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities in the Commonwealth (S985/H3888), whereby disparities result from a range of social and economic factors that are not limited to health care, education and employment, neighborhoods and housing, discrimination, and a variety of social determinants.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES

Priority Bills

In order to continue the Commission's mission of providing an effective voice for the women of Massachusetts, the MCSW identifies priority bills to be the center of our legislative focus. In the 2013-2014 year, the Commission focused on addressing women's self sufficiency through the following legislation.

An Act to Establish Equal Pay (S.983, H.1733)

Lead Sponsors: Sen. Patricia Jehlen and Sen. Karen Spilka, Rep. Jay Livingstone and Rep. Ellen Story

This bill would take a number of action steps in securing pay equity in the Commonwealth. Building upon the previous Comparable Work bill, the Pay Equity bill calls for the same wages to be allocated for positions of comparable skill, effort, and responsibility notwithstanding gender. In order to do so, the bill bars employers from restricting employees in discussing their wages, benefits or other compensation. Further, through its employee protections and safeguards for pay transparency, this bill expands the research, study, and development of definitions with respect to the topics of: pay equity and comparable work, traditional gender roles and the workplace, comparable skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions and the legitimacy of merit-based work systems.

An Act Providing for Equitable Coverage in Disability Policies (H.783)

Lead Sponsors: Rep. Balser and Sen. Lewis

This bill would end sex discrimination in disability insurance policies. Currently, state-regulated disability insurance is classified by sex, and filings at the Division of Insurance show different premiums for men and women with the same job classification. Women pay upwards of 75% more than their male co-workers do for the same insurance. Passing this legislation would end this discrimination and would put disability insurance amongst the many other types of insurance that are legally barred from discriminating based on sex.

Hampden County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (S.1080)

Lead Sponsors: Sen. Anne Gobi

This bill would establish a regional commission on the status of women and girls in the Hampden County. The commission will be composed of nine members with staggered terms that will recommend policies and make recommendations to state and local agencies based on the information gathered from periodically held hearings and testimonies of the area.

Hampshire/Franklin Counties Commission on the Status of Women (H.1867)

Lead Sponsors: Rep. Ellen Story

This bill would establish a joint nine-member commission on the status of women in the Hampshire and Franklin counties. Representing the variety of the towns and municipalities in the Hampshire and Franklin counties, this commission will advocate for women through regular hearings and policy recommendations.

An Act Relative to Healthy Youth (H.448)

Lead Sponsors: Rep. James O'Day and Rep. Paul Brodeur

This bill calls for age-appropriate and medically accurate sexual health education in each school district or public school that currently offers sexual health education. The bill promotes the benefits of abstinence and delay of sexual activity while also addressing the contraceptive and proper barrier methods to prevent unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. Further, the bill also establishes the need for a written policy of curriculum notification for parents and guardians of students receiving sexual health education in their native language.

An Act Establishing a Family Medical Leave and Temporary Disability Leave Insurance Program (H.1718)

Lead Sponsors: Rep. Kenneth Gordon

This bill establishes employee rights to family medical leave or temporary disability leave in the event of the following: the birth of a child of the employee, the placement of a child with the employee for adoption or foster care, the necessity of an employee to care for a family member that has been diagnosed with a serious health condition for a period of time. Further, the bill safeguards the position, compensation, status, and benefits of the employee upon return from leave so long as ample notice to the employer is given.

An Act Establishing the Massachusetts Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (H.1769)

Lead Sponsors: Rep. Ellen Story and Sen. Joan Lovely

This bill provides safeguards for employees with conditions of pregnancy, childbirth, and other related aspects. The bill allots for 'reasonable accommodations' be taken and provided by the employer. These accommodations included but are not limited to more or frequent breaks; time off to recover from childbirth; acquisition or modification of equipment; seating; temporary transfer to a less strenuous or hazardous position; job restructuring; light duty; break time; and private non-bathroom space for expressing breast milk, assistance with manual labor, or modified work schedule.

Resolution to Encourage Equitable and Diverse Gender Representation on the Boards of Companies in the Commonwealth (S.1007)

Filed By: Sen. Karen Spilka

This resolution addresses the mere 14.9% of board seats and the 11.8% of executive officer positions that women hold in 100 of the largest public companies within the Commonwealth. The resolution encourages the equitable and diverse gender representation in the public and private leadership ranks of Massachusetts companies and state government, as well as those companies that do their business in the Commonwealth. Further, the resolution calls for the number of women and total number of individuals on their boards of directors be publically disclosed, in the aim that all corporate boards with nine or more members have a minimum of two female directors.

APPENDIX

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women Public Hearing

Kittredge Center, Holyoke Community College, Holyoke, MA Wednesday, October 22, 2014, 4:30 pm

Present: Commissioners: Tahirah Amatul-Wadud; Penny Blaisdell; Linda Cavaioli; Chris Chanyasulkit; Maureen Curley; Rebecca Donham; Denise Hurst; Mary Kassler; Margot Parrot; also, Executive Director Jill Ashton, Intern Annie Leiter.

Commissioners Denise Hurst and Tahirah Amatul-Wadud welcomed the assembled group with a brief history of the Commission and its purpose. Director Jill Ashton and Intern Annie Leiter were thanked for their work in arranging this hearing, and officials present were welcomed. Representative Ellen Story was recognized to say a few words.

State Representative Ellen Story. She was in the Legislature when they first considered having a MCSW. Susan Weld, wife of then-Governor Weld, attended the World Women's Conference, came back to Massachusetts, and wanted to start a state women's commission. The House Speaker at the time was Rep. Tom Finneran, who had three appointments, one of whom was his anti-choice wife. Other appointees at that time also had some very specific agendas. Today Rep. Story has her hopes up concerning the current commission. Women are about a quarter of the state legislature, and if the women all agree on something, the men are scared to death. Some time ago the issue of infertility and egg transplants was being discussed in legislative committee, but there was not a single woman on that committee. If we women can find issues – like comparable pay for comparable work – and get all the women behind it, the legislation would pass.

At this time, the commissioners introduced themselves and then the testimony began.

Meris Bergquist, Mass Fair Housing Center Director. She said she would speak about housing issues as they effect women and children. Her organization has been in Holyoke for 25 years. They handle 300 to 400 complaints of housing discrimination every year and offer free legal representation to everyone protected under the Fair Housing Act. Discrimination on account of sex was added in 1975. First, she spoke of victims of domestic violence. Often when a woman takes steps to protect herself, she has a need of safe housing. Domestic violence victims comprise 11% of evictions. A few years ago, Governor Patrick declared this an emergency, because it is life or death for women and children. The law needs to be strengthened, and Chapter 151B, the antidiscrimination law, should be amended to add victims of domestic violence as a protected category. Second, she spoke of the inability of single parents of young children to access housing due to lead paint. She said it took one woman from Springfield two years to find housing. We need to increase capacity to promote lead-safe housing. A third issue is sexual harassment in housing. Her organization recently was working with a mother of six with a low wage job, and her landlord was a sexual predator. There was a quid pro quo in order not to evict her. She was vulnerable and hesitant to take action. There needs to be greater outreach and a partnership with the Attorney General, and we must create more safe, decent and affordable housing. Landlords do not want to rent to someone who has been evicted, as many domestic victims are. Think of the situation as a Monopoly board: men have access to the whole board, single women with children to only a fraction.

Joanne Sunshower. She has lived 35 years in the state, 15 of them in Western Mass. She wants to address the need for more investment in Western Mass and enabling more women to start businesses. She quotes a number of reports (Women's Fund, AmEx, U.S. Senate Hearing report) on women's lower earnings. She said that women earn less in the four western counties, with higher numbers of female headed households below the poverty level. As a specific example, a mother with two children needs at least \$50k a year to be self-supporting. In Orange, more single women than anyone else lost their homes to foreclosure. In comparison to other states, Massachusetts ranks #36 in women's business growth. She spoke of a womanowned business in Holyoke providing green diapers and also horse blankets. Women need fair access to capital, to training, and to government contracts. In the world, women's ownership of businesses is an indicator of growth. There is potential for growth in woman-owned farming and value-added to farm products. There are three CDFI's in Western Massachusetts, but we need the state to give matching funds to leverage federal capital. One of the first things to be downsized in the state budget is funds for child care. She would like the Commission to take some role in studying what is needed to really raise women out of poverty.

Bonnie MacCracken, Amherst NAACP Committee on Housing. She wanted to lend a voice about housing instability. She said the state has recently released more housing vouchers but she is still concerned about the barriers. She hears how badly women are made to feel when they go in to ask for housing assistance. As foreclosures increased, there has been more demand [for subsidized housing]. Housing Authority boards need to include tenants and have more diversity. And they need to make sure that women are treated with more respect when they apply for housing.

Cynthia Brubaker, League of Women Voters (LWV), Amherst. She is Co-President with Kathy Vorwerk, who is also in attendance. The LWV grew out of the suffrage movement and takes many advocacy positions around women. She will address three issues. First, reproductive choice. Women must have the freedom to make their own choice, including public funding for birth control and abortion. The LWV was on the *amicus* brief on the buffer zone case. They support laws that deal with abortion as a private matter. Second, domestic violence. One in four women in the U.S. will experience domestic violence. The goal is to prevent violence in general, and the state response should be integrated, including shelters, housing, counselling, training. There needs to be public awareness so it doesn't get swept under the rug. Third, make certain that women have equal opportunity to get jobs, get equal pay, and have equal access to promotions. When women drop out to raise children, their status must be protected and they must be helped to re-enter the job market.

Lucy Hartry, Tapestry Health Systems and a former Commissioner. Her organization has been providing reproductive health services in the region for over 40 years, through a number of sites, including one in Holyoke. They see thousands of women, providing health care for family planning and sexually transmitted diseases. Lucy works at the Northampton site. Massachusetts has been a frontrunner in health insurance, and she is glad to be from Massachusetts, but our health insurance is not a perfect fit, and many people go on and off insurance or simply don't know how to access it. So there is still a need for subsidized services. There is also the issue of young people on their parent's coverage concerned about confidentiality, since the parent will see the insurance information after the visit. There has always been an issue of access to low cost care.

Cindy Miller Springfield and Holyoke have high teen pregnancy rates. This is an economic issue. Once pregnant, there are barriers to finishing school, so these teens feel they have no future. The MCAS testing sets such a high bar that these teens quit. There is a 50% dropout rate in Springfield and Holyoke. Teen pregnancy is a symptom. We need to give young people a better hope for the future, to get them through high school.

Brittany Tarczynski is a domestic violence survivor who has been working with Safe Passage and wanted to share her experience. She needed to use the new Domestic Violence Act signed Aug. 8, because in June she had to seek a restraining order. Her employer saw her the next day with all her bruises. She has had to go to court many times, which is hard to manage when working and being a mom. She provided her employers with the restraining order and a picture, but they expected her to provide them with another summons every time she went to court. She felt she was being revictimized every time she had to explain why she was going to court. Also, her employer started treating her completely differently. The fifteen days allowed for court time under the bill felt like a ticking clock, even though she has had a good experience with the court. The law is good, but it needs to be fixed. She feels she should only have to produce the original restraining order.

Marianne Winters, Executive Director of Safe Passage. We should understand that there is no separation between those who experience domestic violence and the rest of us. Her role: to provide domestic violence services, shelter in Hampshire County, advocacy services. They have had six babies in the past year born to women in the shelter. She herself was a survivor before there were shelters and she has come to understand the multifaceted nature of domestic violence. Domestic violence survivors have higher rates of physical illness, mental illness, poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, joblessness, and social isolation. Spiritually they are feeling hopeless and unimportant. Like black mold, it permeates in places you cannot see. Her agency has launched a rural project, providing a travelling advocate on safety plans. For one woman on a farm, she needed to find a place where she had cell phone service to call police. Another woman in a wheelchair had her phone hidden from her by the abuser, so she needed to be able to tell her health care worker. A third woman had two children who had witnessed the abuse, and when they moved her to a new place, there needed to be a safety plan with the school and a way to transfer the childrens' health care records without the abuser finding them. A new effort has been launched, called "Say Something." There is something everyone can do. They are doing this program with community money, because there is no comprehensive state approach to prevention of domestic violence. The program's strategy is: "Learn, Act, Be." One, domestic violence is a learned behavior. Education is based on a bystander approach, because people can be trained. Two, teach people how to speak up. Three, be part of the transformation in our community. We need more people to understand they may have a role in this.

Dana Carnegie, Girls Scouts of Western and Central Mass Community Relations Manager. Girls Scouting is in its second century and we need to rally around girl leadership. Thirty percent of girls have experienced bullying. Eighty-five percent of middleschoolers have been cyber-bullied, with devastating effects. Girl Scouts joins with other girl-serving organizations throughout the state to reduce bullying and relational aggression.

Amelia Vega, a member of Girl Scouts. Amelia is a senior at Holyoke High School. She is 17 and has two little sisters. Growing up, she was shy and Girl Scouts gave her confidence. She just finished working on her Gold Award in a girls' orphanage in Kenya. Holyoke needs to open up opportunities for girls and needs to empower women, not at age 20 but at 3 or 4.

Shannon Koehn, of Motherwoman, Inc. Her organization has been based in Hadley since 1999, with a mission to support mothers, empowering moms to realize their leadership abilities. They cannot require postpartum screening without providing resources for those who screen positive. In other communities, they are building networks to support moms. They are also working on the "Earned Paid Sick Time" ballot question and the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act. Laws fail to protect pregnant workers, who are at higher risk for premature birth. Denying pregnant workers accommodation puts women in a situation where they must choose between their job and their babies and their own health. Some 75% of working women expect to be pregnant at some time. There are states with laws protecting them. She has also met with Rep. Story to ask her to include "pregnant women" as a protected category under the state anti-discrimination law (Chapter 151B).

Katie Cooney is a Sophomore at Smith College. She spoke on the issue of sexual assault on college campuses. A 2007 study showed that one out of five women in college are the victims of sexual assault. Serial rapists account for 90% of these cases, which are very underreported. Survivors may have to live and go to class with their abusers. Smith is part of the Five College system, of which three are being investigated for Title 9 violations. To address this, she supports H347 (Rep. Cabral's bill) which would train educators on gender bias and sexual violence. She also would like to see a "Yes Means Yes" law such as California has recently passed. She will email details.

Jocelyn Silverlight, President of the Women's Committee of UAW Local 2322. Her union represents over 3000 area workers. There is a need for good jobs with good benefits. Local 2322 represents human service workers and health educators, and these are underpaid. There is a need to raise up women out of poverty by bringing good jobs to the area. She also would ask everyone not to narrowly define "woman" because gender is not binary and identity is not cut and dry. There is a need to push employers to talk about the Domestic Violence Bill. The root of sexism lies in power and money. We need to value women's work of all kinds, and we need to funnel money to non-profits who are doing important work on this issue.

Pam Howland, of Old Window Workshop, is a contractor who has tried to bring women into the construction trades. She spoke of a micro-enterprise experimental grant program that has been pre-approved for Springfield. Micro-enterprise is a way to change women's economic situation. Right now women don't have cell phones or computers for job application, a problem beyond finding child care and transportation. She said unions are not yet prepared to change their cultures for women. She is working with women to restore old windows, but to do this, women need access to tools and a place to work. Springfield and Holyoke are beautiful cities. Women need to live in safe environments without lead, vermin and asbestos. The grant for the old window workshop will mean that women will be making beautiful things out of free materials. The Springfield grant is \$70k, and she hopes to spread this idea. There are windows everywhere, and she said, "Every window is a day's pay, a week's food."

Elizabeth Barajas-Román, of the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts. Hers is a public foundation involved in strategic grantmaking and also running LIPPI, which trains women to run for elected political office. There is a critical need for women's leadership in public office. The U.S. ranks 95th in the world in terms of the percentage of women in our legislatures. The Massachusetts legislature currently has its lowest number of women since 1998. Having more women in office is key, and we must work with the next Governor to incorporate more women. She asked the LIPPI graduates in the audience to stand (there were many) and said the program is "over 200 strong."

Sovann-Malis Loeung, of Amherst, spoke of the effect on her Section 8 rental subsidy when her niece came to live with her in order to attend UMass. The niece got financial aid, which was counted as household income in determining rent, which went up by \$250 per month. She asked why the 1965 Higher Education Act was being used against her. Many students needing financial aid are low income, and we should look at the effects of financial aid counted as income. In 2014 she applied for housing and the paperwork was daunting. Now her income is high enough so if she makes a penny more, she's out of her housing. She is also facing another problem. Her non-received child support is being considered as income and she is being forced to file a contempt motion for non-payment. She said we should look at the effect of forcing someone to collect from former partners. She would have to pay money in order for the court to find him. She wants diversity training in social agencies on women and poverty, because they are insensitive in helping women and people of color.

Vira Douangmany Cage, ACLU of Mass, is a mom and woman of color and a member of the Youth Action Coalition, which brings an arts and social justice curriculum to middle school students. She feels as if "we're on a train car." Oct. 22 is National Day Against Police Brutality. As working moms, our status is directly related to the status of our kids. She started working in April to address the "school to prison pipeline." She accompanies parents to disciplinary hearings and juvenile courts. These parents are missing work, and she is trying to form a coalition to address this problem. She asked, "How do we play a role and address young people's experience in the schools?"

Mary Beth Ogulewicz. She said women have a different kind of understanding: the twin pillars of silence and shame. She's been a prosecutor for over 16 years and she is here to discuss "therapy abuse." She's here to speak to sisters. She has spent 20 years working with women to tell the truth. In order to engage in therapy, you have to surrender your sense of protections, and she was exploited. People in Massachusetts don't keep this data. "Tell" is a group of anonymous women. There is shame in every woman [survivor], even in their 60's and 70's. There is a fear of coming forward. For her there was no redress, because her violator lost his license due to doing the same thing to two previous women. All women are subject to this – 90% of victims are female – and few come forward. More than 23 states have criminalized all sexual conduct between patients and therapists. The dynamic is similar to sexual conduct in prisons. There is a need for a statute. In all other contexts, sexual abuse is criminalized. Even if the violators lose their licenses, they will go on to abuse in other roles. In all the conferences on sexual violence, she has never heard this discussed.

Mary Reardon Johnson, Educational Director of the YWCA of Western Mass, and a former Commissioner. She spoke about the differences between the eastern part of the state and Western Mass. We don't all read the same newspapers or watch the same TV. The Commission has come to her Massachusetts. Certain aspects of life in our region are different. One third of women will experience domestic violence, with 40% unreported, and the numbers have been the same for four decades. In one 24-hour period, 184 women and children were given services by the YWCA of Western Mass. Domestic violence affects all women, but in Western Mass the need is greater. In Western Mass, the average wage is \$4 lower, there is a higher poverty rate and higher unemployment. The teen pregnancy rate is 57 per 1000, four times the state rate, in Holyoke. The Holyoke dropout rate is 26%, compared with 6.5% statewide. The crime rate makes Spring-field the second most dangerous New England city. The western region of DCF has 28,000 consumers.

Joanna Lillian Brown is the author of a book on caring at the end of life, "Caring for Dying Loved Ones." Two thirds of all caregivers are women, who may have to leave their jobs to care for a loved one. Women are 75% of the residents of nursing homes. Current Medicare/Medicaid funding shunts people into nursing homes. There is only one live-in hospice in Western Mass, which increased its beds from six to twelve, and it is private pay. There is a huge crisis in end-of-life care, and people do not have choices. There needs to be a high-level summit on end-of-life care.

Commissioner Chris Chanyasulkit invited all in attendance to our Advocacy Day on May 7, 2015. She said we need everyone and their networks to attend.

Testimony from Mary Lou Conca October 22, 2014

Hello,

I cannot make the hearing today at Holyoke Community College scheduled for today. I do however want to submit written testimony to be read.

I am a fifty-nine year-old woman who has been in the work field for forty-five years.

I began working at the age of fourteen when I went to city hall to obtain my working papers that my mother had to sign. I then submitted those papers, received a social security number, and began flipping burgers. My career making onion rings, and fried clams at Jolly Burger paid only minimum wage of \$1.60 per hour.

Today I hold an Associate in Science Degree, Aquinas College, Newton, MA and a Bachelor of Arts Degree, cum laude, The University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.

I work as a substitute teacher and earn \$10.00 an hour--the school district I have worked for the past five years just changed their daily stipend this school year, from \$60 a day for a seven hour day, to \$70. Not much of a raise considering a school system could not run without substitutes who are often available, literally, at a moment's notice. The majority of substitutes are also women.

My point in submitting testimony for today's hearing is that women are being shortchanged in the work field. My years of experience, since 1989, in the education field are not recognized in my current work as a substitute. Nor are my degrees. The pay is not substantial nor does it even closely represent a livable wage.

When I left my last position in education I was earning \$14.72 @hour after working for nine years in that system. A young man, a family friend, began working for the same district and began his first year at \$15.83 @hour. I was astonished to learn this. I know this gentleman did not have any degrees in education, or from any college for that matter, yet he was being paid, at an entry level position, a higher rate than I was earning with nine years experience.

I am sure there are many more similar stories of women not being recognized or properly paid for their work experience, and overlooked in their job search.

I wish to have the wheels changed in this cycle--Equal pay for equal work is not happening in Massachusetts. I believe a woman earns 70 cents or less to every dollar a man earns.

I would like to work on a committee to change this--especially in light of the fact that there are so many single mothers out there working outside of the home, and raising children. Our children who will soon be running this country deserve to have the same opportunities of their upper class peers. If their mothers are not being paid properly--the children are the ones who suffer this shortcoming. Thank you for hearing my story.

Most Sincerely,

Mary Lou Conca

MCSW Public Hearing October 22, 2014 - Holyoke -

Oral Testimony from Dana Carnegie, Girl Scouts of Central & Western Mass

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments to this distinguished group. I am Dana Carnegie. I am the Community Relations Manager for the Girl Scouts of Central and Western Massachusetts with offices in Worcester and right here in Holyoke.

For over a century, Girl Scouts has provided leadership opportunities that build girls of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place. We are proud of our century of trailblazing, but in our 2nd century, it's time to do more. To take bold steps. To rally the state of Massachusetts around the cause of girls' leadership.

So much is going on with girls today. They're backing down, opting out, and shying away from leading. They're backing away from science and mathematics, they are being pressured by industries that celebrate unattainable beauty, and they are being bullied by their peers.

According to the Girl Scout Research Institute's *State of the Girls* report, about 30 percent of girls have experienced some form of bullying or relational aggression from their peers.

Almost one-third of students report that they have been bullied at school, and six out of ten teens witness bullying at least once a day.

Eighty-five percent of middle-school students say they've been cyberbullied at least once.

The number of negative social and emotional repercussions of bullying is staggering and includes depression, social isolation, academic problems, delinquent behavior, and suicide.

We need to not only hear these statistics, we need to own them. Once we own them then we can do something about them.

Researchers argue that successful anti-bullying programs incorporate the building of social and emotional skills such as handling challenges constructively, demonstrating concern for others, exercising empathy, recognizing and managing emotions, and making responsible decisions. Cornerstones of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

Healthy social and emotional development is fundamental to a child's overall health, ethical development, motivation to achieve, academic performance, and involvement in the community.

safe passage

October 22, 2014

To: Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

From: Marianne Winters, Executive Director, Safe Passage, Inc.

RE: Testimony presented at Regional Public Hearing on Women's Issues

Thank you for this opportunity to share this testimony with you. I plan to focus on the issues related to Interpersonal Violence – more commonly referred to as domestic and sexual violence. My professional role is as Executive Director of Safe Passage, an organization founded in 1977 as part of the national and international movement devoted to addressing the broad impact of violence against women on individuals, their children, and communities. Safe Passage is part of a movement that grew from a deep understanding that the "Personal is Political". My personal connection to this work is as a survivor of domestic and sexual violence, and this has influenced every aspect of my life, including my life's work.

At Safe Passage, we understand the broad and multifaceted impact of domestic violence on a woman and her family. It impacts her life:

Physically - survivors of violence have higher rates of heart disease, breast and cervical cancer, hypertension, gastrointestinal disorders, and autoimmune conditions.

Mentally and emotionally – survivors of interpersonal violence experience higher rates of depression, anxiety, mental illness, and addictions.

Economically – survivors of interpersonal violence experience higher rates of poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, gaps in education and job training, and difficulty finding and maintaining employment.

Socially – survivors often are isolated and lack the basic social network essential for support, self esteem, help with parenting, and stability.

Spiritually – survivors often feel hopeless, insignificant, unconnected, disconnected from themselves, and forgotten.

Each of these broad impacts is well documented with research and anecdotal evidence, which together tells us that interpersonal violence permeates our culture, neighborhoods, and homes. In fact, interpersonal violence cannot be boiled down to one discreet issue, but is an underlying factor and consideration for every issue that is addressed by government and every community endeavor. There is no separating interpersonal violence from issues of economic self-sufficiency,

women's health, environmental justice, taxes, access to reproductive healthcare, housing, and neighborhood safety.

Let me give you some examples:

Our newly launched rural project, a collaboration with Hilltown Community Health Centers, provides an advocate who travels the back roads of places like Goshen, Chester, and Williamsburg to work with women who are at high risk of danger now to build safety plans. For one woman, her safety plan included walking the acreage around her property with her cell phone to find a strong enough signal, far enough away from her house, yet close enough to get to when she needs the police. For this woman, the issues of cell phone coverage, internet access in rural towns, public transportation, and police training are directly related to domestic violence.

For another woman, who has a disability and requires assistance to get dressed and into her wheelchair, her safety plan includes easy access to her telephone for emergencies and a plan to disclose her situation to her home health worker. For this woman, the issues of home health care and access to a ramp at her front door, a wheelchair and the ability to keep her driver's license in place, along with a hand operated vehicle, as well as training for healthcare workers are directly related to domestic violence.

For yet another woman, whose school aged children heard and saw the violence perpetrated by their father, her family's recovery plan includes moving to a safe place while continuing her children's education and activities. For her, teachers who understand the learning difficulties that some children have after trauma, and a school system that is equipped with a safety plan are domestic violence issues. A health care system that will allow her to transfer her children's immunization records, without letting the abuser know what town they live in now is a domestic violence issue. Likewise, access to a violin for her youngest and a soccer uniform for her oldest child are domestic violence issues since these items were left at home as she fled with her kids.

For each of these women, and for the thousands who reach domestic violence and sexual assault programs in Massachusetts, there are people in their lives – the store owners, pastors, school teachers, employers, neighbors who have an opportunity to support their transformation from danger to safety. This is the promise of our work, yet is harnessing this potential toward prevention is not visible as a priority. Currently, there is no source of state funding that supports comprehensive prevention of domestic violence. While there are individual projects that support parts of the work – there is no statewide funding source to support prevention.

I often say that if you give me 5 minutes of your time, I can help you discover the role you can have in your life toward ending interpersonal violence. At Safe Passage, we clearly see that everyone, regardless of their roles in their lives, can have an impact. This is the principle behind Say Something – our local prevention effort.

At Safe Passage, in spite of the lack of government prevention money available, we feel that prevention is key to our work, so we used community based fundraising money to develop a new prevention approach called Say Something.

We base it on 3 steps: Learn, Act, and Be

First we Learn

Domestic violence is a learned behavior; it's the logical conclusion to our society's constant barrage of messages that promote an oppressive, power-over, patriarchal, and hostile culture. Oppression plays out on a societal and institutional level and gets played out individually through domestic violence, through abuse of power and control in relationships, through sexual violence, through bullying, through racist and cultural slurs and hate crimes against people of color, immigrants, through hate crimes and harassment against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

We know that we can educate and hold people accountable while at the same time realize that people who engage in violence are merely reflecting the violence of our society. It starts in subtle and even unseen ways. In fact, these subtle and relatively minor offenses are what make the rest of the violence possible. These are the things like jokes about rape, demeaning and humiliating language and objectification. These are the things for which there are often no legal penalties, and which get passed over.

Through Say Something, we learn about the impact of the little things and we learn about how acts of physical and sexual violence wouldn't exist, were it not for the cultural foundation of sexism that promotes attitudes, speech, behavior, social structures, laws, and institutions that are systematically biased in favor of men.

We also learn how to hold what we call the gender paradox. While the research about domestic and sexual violence shows that it is mostly committed by men against women, we also know that the vast majority of research studies use a gender binary of male and female as the only two possible genders. So, why should we be surprised that the research is largely silent on violence against and committed by transgender folks. We also know that violence is often a part of same sex relationships, with women and men in roles as either victim or perpetrator. Finally, we know that as humans we have a capacity to handle this paradox. We remember and learn how to articulate that people experience violence differently depending on their gender and that people of all genders deserve to live in a violence-free world, and that it won't do us any good to render any gender invisible in our analysis or in our work.

We take what we've learned and Act

Speaking up requires more than knowledge and more than determination – it takes skills. Thankfully, they are not complicated skills – like juggling or doing a handstand on a balance beam. But, they do require some practice and they get better and easier with practice. These skills are: Awareness, Intuition, Assertiveness, Judgment, and flying fearlessly in the face of Awkwardness.

Then we Be – We become part of the transformative power of community that can work to prevent interpersonal violence.

Once we learn and then build skills so that we can act, we make a decision to be part of the transformation that can and will ultimately end domestic violence. We hold a vision - a clear and focused picture, almost as if it were a memory, of a relationship, a school, and city or town, a country, a world that is free of violence. The vision of an absence of violence in relationships is

much more exciting than simply a relationship where there's no hitting, verbal abuse, or financial abuse. Just like we have a vision for a world without war - we call it peace. Our vision of peace is much deeper and more exciting than simply a world where nobody is shooting at anybody. Peace is a vision that necessarily includes economic fairness, environmental sustainability, justice and accountability, wellness and freedom, relationships based on joy, mutual support, growth, and contributing to the community. Every one of us has a part in realizing this vision. It will take our focused and sustained attention and support at every decision point by each of us. It will require us to be open, to be willing, to be hopeful, to honor our ancestors and prepare for our children, to give ourselves constant permission and to seek inspiration to be the light of change.

We know that interpersonal violence does not have to be a reality, and we would like to help lead the way toward this vision. Our efforts, however grounded in research and efficacy, cannot become widespread without funding and without community and statewide commitment to prevention.

I thank you for your time and once again, for this rare opportunity.

Written Testimony Submitted by Brenda Murphy

October 21, 2014

Just saw an article re your hearing tomorrow in Holyoke. Although I am unable to attend, would like to offer my opinion. We adopted a child with undiagnosed mental and medical health conditions. Instead of helping, the mass dcf attacked us. Lied to the court to gain custody. Would not allow our daughter to come home even though there was no evidence of neglect /abuse. Then our rights were terminated based on a mass law that allows termination when child is in foster care for 15 months - not neglect / abuse. As a mother, I am devastated that I could not protect my kids from this abuse of power by dcf.

In addition, dcf does not comply with their own regulations. We are finally in court over an appealed 51a from 2006. It took dcf 3 years to give us our "fair hearing" and another 4 years to send their decision. This process, per dcf regs, should take about 6 months before court - not 7 years. How many other children are torn from their moms and homes?

Brenda Murphy

Longmeadow, MA

Written Testimony Submitted by Lucy Hartry

October 21, 2014

Cindy Miller, Springfield and Holyoke Health Services Manager, and I testified yesterday at the Holyoke hearing. We represented Tapestry Health, a human service agency providing reproductive health, HIV prevention, WIC services to the four counties of western Massachusetts. We spoke about the importance of continued state subsidized reproductive health services despite mandated health insurance coverage. Many people do not have insurance despite the mandate because they are between jobs, have let it lapse, or they have it, but co-pays and deductibles are too high, or they are on their parent's insurance and want confidentiality for our services. In addition, Holyoke and Springfield experience the state's highest teen pregnancy and high school dropout rates. The rates are above the state average and are even higher for teens of color. We urge the continued funding for supportive programs to help teens graduate from high school and provide hope for their futures.

Lucy Hartry, Northampton Health Services Manager

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Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, Testimony of Mary Reardon Johnson October 22, 2014 Holyoke Community College

Good evening Commissioners:

My name is Mary Reardon Johnson. I am the Executive Director of the YWCA of Western Massachusetts. It was my honor to serve on the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women as the designee of two Governors. Among the many things that I learned during my terms of service was that many Commissioners assumed that we <u>all</u> read the same newspapers and watched the same news on TV. Although I consider myself an educated and informed woman, as a native of Springfield, I have never subscribed to the Boston Globe nor turned to WBZ for the latest news. We have our <u>own</u> TV stations and newspapers in Western Mass. We do not all share the same stories or articles to reference.

I must also confess that even though I am a lifelong resident of the Commonwealth, I have little experience or knowledge on how to navigate "the T"...or any other form of public transportation. The Massachusetts residents around me use their R's and we park our cars much cheaper than those in the eastern part of the state!

Please know that I am sincerely appreciative of those Commissioners who have made the effort and took the time to travel out West this evening. The Connecticut River, Holyoke Mountain Range, Springfield Armory, Basketball and Volleyball Hall of Fames are <u>my</u> landmarks. Bay Path, Springfield, Smith, Mt. Holyoke, Amherst, AIC are among the colleges <u>I</u> think of in our state. It is meaningful that you have come to my Massachusetts...it isn't better or worse, but it is surely different. I invite all of you to come spend a day with me.

While there are countless reasons that I am proud to call Western Massachusetts my home, I am here today to talk to you about how certain aspects of life in our region can be challenging, concerning and sometimes even tragic.

I'll begin by talking about an issue that is not unique to Western Massachusetts, or even to our Commonwealth the numbers about violence against women are well researched and widely circulated: 1 in 3 women in the US will experience rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner in her lifetime. 15.5 million children are exposed to domestic violence each year and we know this exposure has wide reaching and lifelong mental and emotional impacts. 40% of domestic violence incidents are never reported to the police, with this number soaring above 60% for sexual assaults. Sadly, while these numbers are better documented and publicized today, they have remained the same for the nearly 4 decades I have worked as a social worker in Western MA.

Every year, the National Network to End Domestic Violence conducts what they call a "National Census of Domestic Violence." For a 24-hour period, every domestic violence service provider in the country is asked to track how many people they provide services to, in hopes of capturing the tremendous scope and pervasiveness of this nationwide epidemic. As a very long tenured Executive Director of the Commonwealth's largest provider of domestic violence services, the numbers are still sobering. In a 24-hour period, the YWCA of Western Massachusetts provided shelter and support services to 184 women and children. In one 24-hour period, 184 individuals feared for their life and the lives of their children. 184 individuals didn't know where they were going to sleep that night because it was too dangerous to go home. 184 individuals were subjected to fear, vulnerability and a sense of helplessness and despair. AND we all know that this number is much higher than 184. For each woman that reaches out for help and support, there are countless more who are living each day in fear. Living each day hoping that they'll finally get that job that pays them enough money to leave, hoping that they'll finally find a safe and affordable apartment to flee to, hoping that their friends and family will support their decision to leave, hoping that one day, the person they love will stop hurting them.

Domestic violence is an issue that impacts people in every community in this Commonwealth, no matter their age, race or socioeconomic class. While the violence may be universal, the barriers that trap women in these dangerous and abusive situations are not. Women in Western Massachusetts face an uphill battle that, in many ways, is much steeper than their counterparts in other parts of the state. Hampden County has the highest number of abuse prevention orders in the state accounting for 21% vs. Suffolk's 12%

Citizens in Western Massachusetts face a challenging economic climate: the average hourly wage in Western MA is nearly \$4/hour lower than the state average, the poverty rate is 17.1%, compared to the state poverty rate of 11% and the unemployment rate of 8% is much higher than the state rate of 5.8%.

To make matters worse, many people living in our region are faced with situations early in their life that makes the climb of economic mobility extremely steep and difficult. The teen pregnancy rate in our region is the highest in the state, with Holyoke leading the way at 57.1 pregnancies for every 1000 teens, which is 4 times the state pregnancy rate. Compounding this issue are some of the highest high school dropout rates in the Commonwealth. In 2013, Springfield Public High Schools had a dropout rate of 25.1%. Holyoke Public Schools had a dropout rate of 26.8%. These numbers already sound disturbingly high, but when compared to the average dropout rate of 6.5% for the state, they become a sobering reality. The numbers show time and time again that minorities, teen parents and individuals who lack a high school diploma are plagued by disproportionately high unemployment rates, poverty rates and much lower average wages over their lifetime.

Our crime rate in Springfield distinguished us as the second most dangerous city in New England several years ago...neither Boston nor Worcester made the list. Our rate of STD's also

exceeds those of the major metropolitan areas of the Commonwealth. The Western Region of DCF accounts for 42% of the children in their care vs. the Boston Region which is 13%...Western MA has over 28,000 DCF consumers vs Boston's 8,800!

I love Western Massachusetts. As I mentioned, I was born here. I have lived and worked here most of my 64 years. Although it is also home for most of my extended family, It is NOT where I will choose to retire. I simply cannot continue to watch the increasing demands for services and the dwindling resources.

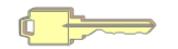
I appreciate your attention to the wonderful diversity of our Commonwealth. It is something to be celebrated, studied and explored. You will find some disparities that should be corrected. I ask for your attention and advocacy on behalf of all women in Massachusetts.

Thank you for your focus on Western Massachusetts this evening.

Mary Reardon Johnson, Executive Director YWCA of Western Massachusetts One Clough Street Springfield, MA 01118

413.755.3101 mrj@ywworks.org





Written Statement by Meris Bergquist, Executive Director, Massachusetts Fair Housing Center, at a Regional Public Hearing before the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women October 22, 2014

Thank you for the opportunity to address the primary obstacles that women and children face when they try to access housing. The Massachusetts Fair Housing Center is the oldest fair housing agency in the state. Our mission is to eliminate housing discrimination and ensure equal housing opportunities for all. We accept and investigate approximately 300 complaints of housing discrimination each year and, in appropriate cases, we offer free legal representation to victims of housing discrimination. Our work promotes housing choice, preserves tenancies, avoids homelessness, creates lead-safe housing for children, protects victims of domestic violence and provides disabled tenants with equal access to housing.

Everyone is protected from discrimination under the fair housing laws. However, there are specific ways in which women may experience discrimination. Congress made it illegal to discriminate in housing on the basis of sex in 1975. Yet women today still experience multiple forms of housing discrimination in the rental housing markets of Western and Central Massachusetts. I would like to highlight three distinct areas where women suffer adverse treatment in housing.

Female Victims of Domestic Violence. Landlords discriminate against female victims of domestic violence when they try to evict them following an act of violence committed against them, ¹ and when they refuse to rent to a victim of domestic violence. ² Thus, at the very moment when a women needs a safe and stable home, landlords file evictions or refuse to rent an available apartment to the victim. These discriminatory practices can have life and death consequences for a woman seeking to end an abusive relationship. When Congress passed legislation to protect the housing rights of female victims it made a specific finding that women remain in abusive relationships because they cannot find long-term housing. ³ Domestic abuse typically escalates over time, thus the inability to secure housing because of discrimination places victims at risk of greater violence or death. In 2008, citing increases in domestic violence homicides, Governor Deval Patrick declared domestic violence a public health emergency in

¹A 2005 study of 76 legal and social services providers, conducted by the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) and the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), found that 11% of all evictions involved evictions of victims of domestic violence. Housing Denials and Evictions Across the Country, National Center on Homelessness & Poverty (February 2007), available at http://www.nsvrc.org.

² No Vacancy: Housing Discrimination Against Survivors of Domestic Violence in the District of Columbia, Equal Rights Center (April 2008), available at http://www.equalrightscenter.org.

³⁴² U.S.C. Section 14043e(7) ("Victims of domestic violence often return to abusive partners because they cannot find long-term housing.")







Massachusetts. The number of domestic violence homicides more than doubled from 15 in 2005 to 42 in 2007. There are some housing protections available to some female victims of domestic violence. Victims who live in federally subsidized housing are protected from some forms of housing discrimination based on their status as victims of domestic violence. There are also some protections in the state and federal fair housing act. However, stronger laws are needed and it is time for Massachusetts to add "victims of domestic violence" to the protected categories under the state anti-discrimination laws.

Female Single Parent Households with Children under Age 6. Landlords discriminate against families with children under the age of 6. We receive 3-5 calls every month from female-headed households who are unable to find rental housing because landlords refuse to abide by the Massachusetts Lead Poisoning Prevention Act. This law does two things: first it prohibits landlords from refusing to rent an apartment to families with children under 6 and second it requires landlords to abate the lead hazard before a family with children under six can reside there. Instead of complying with the law, landlords, who suspect there may be lead paint in the unit, simply refuse to rent to families with children under 6. Much of the rental housing stock in Western Massachusetts was built before 1979. In Springfield, the largest city in our region, 89% of the housing stock was built before 1979. Thus this pervasive discrimination against families with young children on the basis of lead paint, drastically reduces the availability of rental properties in our Western Massachusetts rental market for these families. Given the extent of the problem, based on the aging housing stock, our agency does not have the capacity to engage in the robust enforcement activity that is needed to address this problem. To properly address this issue, which affects so many families with young children, the State should provide funding to fair housing agencies, like MFHC, that have the expertise to bring enforcement actions and protect the rights of all children to live in lead-safe housing.

Sexual Harassment. This is a hidden problem. We recently assisted a woman who lived in substandard housing. This was private housing that someone without a voucher could afford. However, her landlord preyed on his female tenants. In her case, because she had five children, including a disabled child and a low paying job as a clerk in a convenience store she would often get behind in her rent. The landlord used this situation to obtain sexual favors. He insinuated that he would not evict her if she cooperated with him. He would invite her into an apartment and ask her try on clothing. He made unwanted physical advances and let her know that if she didn't comply he could successfully evict her as he had other tenants in the past. She believed he had this power over her. To address this hidden problem, there needs to be greater outreach to these vulnerable women about how to report this harassment and protect their right to be free from sexual harassment in housing. For a longer-term solution, there is an immediate need for more safe and affordable rental housing for low-income single-parent households.



Housing Discrimination Project

Housing discrimination against women and children causes real harm, in the form of evictions, emotional distress and extended housing search times.⁴ It is time to strengthen our laws to protect female victims of domestic violence and increase the capacity of fair housing organizations, like the Massachusetts Fair Housing Center, and others to protect the rights of families with children to live in lead-safe housing and for female tenants to live free from the fear of sexual harassment in housing.

⁴ In an article published by Oxford University Press in 2013, the authors concluded after analyzing the court records of evictions in Milwaukee County in 2010 and interviewing 251 tenants, that children were a risk factor for eviction. See Matthew Desmond, et al., Evicting Children, Social Forces, vol. 92 (2013): 303-27.



United Automobile, Aerospace & Agricultural Implement Workers

"Many faces, one Union!"

Local 2322

October 22, 2014

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women UAW 2322 Women's Committee Statement

Good evening, I am Jocelyn Silverlight, president of United Auto Workers Local 2322 based out of Holyoke. We represent over 3,000 workers in early education, higher education and health & human services. I am here as a representative of our Local women's committee which met together to write this letter to you this evening. We want to thank you for the opportunity to speak on the status of women in our community.

As a labor union, we deeply know and feel the need for good jobs with high wages and benefits. We know that women historically make less money than men and that there are fewer resources for women to have gainful employment.

Our local represents thousands of women who work in workplaces that fill needed holes in our community.

These are human service, health-field and education jobs. These jobs are not paying women and all workers a living wage. Constantly these fields are facing cuts in funding and we desperately need funds funneled into these professions by the Commonwealth. We have an opportunity to raise up women's well beings by funding these fields.

We need to raise women out of poverty by funneling funding into these fields so that women can continue to enter them. We need funding for training, education, adequate child care, health care, accessible transportation and additional benefits. We also need more industry in our communities to create opportunities for jobs beyond service in order to raise women out of poverty.

In these conversations we are also reminded of the necessity of expanding the scope of importance on this subject. We ask you all to recognize the need to be inclusive in conversations about women. We cannot narrowly define what it means to be a woman and who is or is not included in this. We need to be mindful that gender is not a binary and make space in these conversations to be inclusive. We also need to remember that

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gender does not operate on its own. It is affected by multiple aspects of identity, such as race, sexuality, ability and so on.

While identity is not cut and dry, and identifying as a woman certainly is not, we are sure that good, well paying jobs and access to opportunities such as training, education, affordable child care and accessible transportation is important. As leaders of our union, we need to be able to advocate for women in our area and be informed on access to resources. We need to push our employers to talk to workers about the domestic violence bill. We need to not wait until something tragic happens. We know that the root of sexism lies in power and money. We know that money is used as control overwhelmingly in cases of domestic violence, and in the everyday violence that women face when they are excluded from or fighting to be part of fields of work that value men and devalue the work of women. We need to value women's work in the home and in our communities. We need to fund programs that are overwhelmingly worked by women such as mental and behavioral health or education. It is time for us to focus our resources on strengthening and backing the services women provide so we can rise beyond a cycle of poverty.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on these issues.

Respectfully submitted, UAW 2322 Women's Committee: Danielle Allessio, Nancy Fish, Alex Gross, Liz Mancevice, Jocelyn Silverlight, Erin Wilson



Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women

Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts
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October 22, 2014

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to address this esteemed board. The WFWM is a public foundation that supports and advances women and girls in the four counties of western Massachusetts in the key areas of education, economic justice and safety and freedom from violence. We carry out our mission by making social change grants, offering programs and promoting women's leadership. Our Leadership Institute for Political and Public Impact (LIPPI) meets in this same room monthly and trains women to run for elected office. 200 women have gained that training in the last five years and many are here today.

I'm here to talk about the critical need for more women in leadership positions at all levels of government. Almost five times as many men hold elected office in the United States then women. The United States currently ranks 95th in the world in the number of women serving in their national legislatures. We are behind Mexico, China and Pakistan.

While women make up over 51% of the Massachusetts population:

- Women only make up 25.5% of the Massachusetts legislature.
- The Massachusetts legislature has the lowest number of women serving since 1998.
- In 2012, Massachusetts elected Elizabeth Warren as the first woman in the senate in its history.

Women have a different understanding on needs in policy areas such as childcare, healthcare, transportation, jobs and education—from early childhood education to literacy and college education for their children and themselves. Women in elected office bring new perspectives to



issues, which increases the likelihood of conceiving and implementing effective and just solutions to social, economic, and environmental problems.

A year and a half ago, we conducted a survey of issues facing women and their families in western Massachusetts. Our "Status of Women in Western MA" report highlighted these kinds of political disparities along with many other gender differences around health, education, voter turnout rates and much more. We held listening sessions in the four counties for people to discuss the factors that contributed to the data. Time and again, people said that having more women in public office would go a long way toward addressing problems.

I'm here today to urge you to work with the next governor of Massachusetts to fill at least half of her or his political appointments with the highly qualified women who make up this state. Women represent at 50% of the population and should hold appointed positions in order to have their perspectives and voices incorporated into state and local dialogue.

The Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts, along with our 200 graduates and current members of our Leadership Institute for Political and Public Impact program, are happy to work with the Commission to move this recommendation forward.

Thank you and I look forward to working with you in the future.

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Dear Members of the Commission,

"When you know better, you do better" ~ Maya Angelou

I now know better.

By way of background, I was formerly a criminal prosecutor for approximately 18 years. My area of expertise was family violence. I was among the first group of attorneys trained in the 1990's to become advocates in the nascent movement to prosecute domestic violence. I also devoted much of my advocacy work to keeping women and children safe through prosecution of cases of sexual violence and child abuse. Empowering victims to courageously speak their truth was the common thread of my life's work.

Most importantly, I am a mother of four children. Though I worked, my children, their interests, and the organizations that touched their lives were significant points of light in my life. I was passionately engaged with my community through service. As a Girl Scout leader for two troops, I took girls, who would not have otherwise had the opportunity, winter camping, snow shoeing, and skiing. I taught cooking in an after school program and volunteered as a classroom aide for math centers. I was a recess monitor marking laps completed by children, cheering them on as they discovered physical strength. I taught religious education for children, teens in high school and adults. I served as a member of the Board of Directors for our town library and my children's preschool, and eventually became an elected town official serving as Vice Chair of my community's school committee. These activities wove service, community and meaning into the fabric of my life and family. While not perfect, I had a life characterized by devotion to my family, service to community institutions that supported children, and work that held as a central tenet healthy and safe communities for children and adults.

In 2008, I began experiencing personal problems and was referred to a psychologist practicing in Massachusetts. He came recommended by another attorney. He had extensive experience in the field of mental health having held positions of significant clinical and administrative responsibility at community agencies I was familiar with. He had also worked at the Veterans Administration, the Hampshire County House of Corrections and taught at Harvard. I had no personal experience utilizing therapeutic services before this point in time, but his credentials lent him credibility, solidity and trustworthiness.

While performing the duties of a duly licensed Massachusetts psychologist he sexually and emotionally abused me during the course of therapeutic treatment. For a woman with my background, education and professional expertise, writing that sentence is humiliating and almost unbelievable, even now. Equating the word "victim" with my persona seems inconceivable and is still difficult to reconcile. With the help of high quality mental health professional services, I have come to understand what happened and that is why I am writing you.

He is no longer licensed as a psychologist. He had his license revoked several years ago for engaging in sexual relations with another former patient. I have read those documents after requesting them. The complainant stated she came forward because she learned in the intervening years that he had sexually abused a second patient. That would make three of us. During the course of those revocation proceedings, he filed a written response acknowledging the incident. Thereafter, fearing reprisal, he failed to appear at his hearing, and his license was revoked. He gained a second hearing on appeal and went to hearing before the Board. While the impression left was that the relationship at issue was a one time incident in his distant past, an aberrant mistake in an otherwise flawless professional record, at the time of the revocation hearing he was sexual abusing me, his patient. His behavior and treatment were in direct contravention of established therapeutic protocol for treatment and behavior post-treatment. He was a serial sexual offender of patients entrusted to his care and because his license was revoked already, there is no redress available to me. Being a victim further down the line, I receive no justice and he is now counseling other women under the guise of life coaching, holistic life counseling and personal training.

Moving through the stages of this complex and confusing state, I find myself at a loss to understand how this happened. Moreover, I am appalled by how easily I unmoored from all anchors that gave my life meaning. For years I blamed myself, that misperception and burden being fostered by him. I would often try to end the therapy. My frequent refrain to him was that it was killing my soul, it felt like being stuck in the La Brea Tar Pits. Ignoring his professional and ethical responsibility, his response was that I couldn't. He argued I didn't get to end it. It was not a one sided decision that I alone could decide nor could end. He would then engage me in conversation and it would perpetually resume. It was only when huge swaths of my life simultaneously conflated that I sought help from another mental health professional whose skillfulness and integrity gave me support to establish durable barriers. Creating impenetrable barriers afforded me spaciousness for the harder work of seeing things as they truly were. When I emerged, it felt like I came out of a fugue state. My actions and behavior in that period barely recognizable to me.

Contrasting therapeutic experiences has illuminated and distinguished the exploitative aspect of his treatment. I have now experienced appropriate professional support and boundaries. The mental health providers I worked with in recovery established a safe, capacious container for me to explore this episode. Having researched therapy, his response does not comport with recognized professional therapeutic responses. Though I felt shameful, I have since learned that abuse is not an uncommon occurrence in the course of treatment. Reporting my incident to the investigator at the licensing board I learned from him the dismal rates of women going forward. Importantly, therapists are trained to observe and pointedly utilize emotion to assist patients in delving into the

deeper meaning, acutely aware that patient's have issues. His response was unscrupulous, especially given the fact that he was a seasoned practitioner. He was 64 years old at the time. More stunningly, the fact that he was facing charges for engaging in unethical sexual conduct with a patient at that very same time reveals an egregious level of professional deviation, manipulation, betrayal of ethical standards as well as certain unfitness for ministering to another's mental health. The psychological strain of the circumstances that followed precipitated a profound psychological crisis in me.

Disclosure not being a linear process, the pace of my progress oscillated, guided by my ability to accept the redefinition of the experience. It was extremely chaotic trying to discern the truth. My brain felt like "word salad". My default setting is to rest in argumentative reasoning. For every statement, my mind marshals equally convincing arguments for either contention. In this circumstance, it was confusing. It kept me mired in circular reasoning. An example: he asked me to visit. When I balked, he became angry explaining he had cleaned with bleach that day because he was expecting me to come. I had disclosed in therapy that the scent of bleach was one of my favorite childhood smells, evocative of my mother. Examining the situation, I would conclude that he was preying on me, tapping into subtle sensory triggers, in a desperate attempt to keep me from ending the relationship as I spent less and less time with him. Then, I would reexamine it and tell myself that he was, in fact, being thoughtful, and caring, attending to details that were soothing to me. I would feel guilty for not gratifying his needs which would move me to action consistent with meeting his needs, quieting the guilt, and swallowing my own voice. Setting a pattern that would be played out over and over again.

In these moments, I could not discern what was true. It was a constant tug of war between trying to access logic and background experience and compare that to the flood of emotions that tugged in another direction. He would write, "I don't want you to leave me." "I feel torn between taking care of my own needs and desires and taking care of your wishes. I would appreciate conversation with you this afternoon." "Even though you choose to ignore me I continue to miss you." "Your curt responses have not softened me." "People fall in love in some of the most unique and unconventional circumstances...even circumstances that are societally frowned upon. But the feelings are true just the same. Deprivation, denial (which doesn't work for us) and avoidance is masochistic." "I think you need to stop limiting your beliefs. You may have competing truths but they are both real. We are not mutually exclusive." "I know I wish I could turn your head and mind around to me again but it seems hopeless." "Despite how many times you push me away and keep things from me my feelings remain the same." "You get caught in the shame and I understand that. Yet hiding how we feel will likely haunt you and find its way to the surface eventually. It always does. That's the most destructive source of pain and injury." "Your view is obscured. Mine is clear." "I guess you have no respect for me and want me to step out of the way. Take a good look in the mirror." He eventually began to follow me showing up in unexpected places. When he threatened to attend a class I was running after I had long severed him and told him it was not possible he responded, "Do you think I have no freedom of choice? I don't feel that's ok." With the endless back and forth I was trapped. I was in the grips of a psychological and emotional hold that I could not get out of. I thought he was older, wiser, more knowledgeable; I attributed his opinions more credence and deference due to his

expertise as a psychologist. He consumed my life and attention. It was not until I enforced distance that I could gain internal coherence. I was then able to observe the obscured contours of my life. That enabled me to leave.

Suffering in extreme has a salutary effect. With all exits closed, the suffering finally pierced the shroud of confusion. Patched up justifications of therapeutic value no longer swayed me. My emotions stabilized and the objective evidence of loss pointed the way. I often thought of the presidential campaign line of Ronald Reagan, "Are you better off today than you were four years ago?" I pirated that slogan, turned it into my personal mantra and returned to it again and again when weakness called. It helped steel my determination.

The realization that followed was excrutiating. My values had been overturned, my preoccupation with having to meet his needs had consumed my life, and the smothering, destructive, recurrent presence of him had destroyed everyone and everything I loved. He had shrouded my family, my thinking and my way of life and worst my entire mind. Trying to parse my complicity, accountability, and acquiescence and attribute my responsibility has been disquieting. I was torn between condemning myself with critical judgment and allowing self compassion that was informed by my growing awareness of the dynamics at play in therapy abuse. At times, it felt like I would die inside a black hole of self loathing. I was finally awake but lost, without even a clue as to how to begin living again. I continue to walk the edge of despair. It left me unstable and suicidal, the process of recovery being at least as psychically painful as the relationship. I am still not sure of the answers.

My ability to face the loss and truth of the experience ebbed and flowed, as complex and conflicting feelings of loyalty and betrayal buffeted me. As insight began to dawn, even if only momentarily at first, though it was painful, it could not be squelched. Something deep inside me beckoned. A sense of reality though buried deep was bursting to grow. The call for a more stable life became a matter of survival.

Recognizing the need for a new path and navigating the path are two very different tasks. I had to browse the shelves of my strengths and take up tools I had set aside but that I knew would serve me well. My mental posse included order, investigation, list making, isolation, absorption, liberal use of profanity, self knowledge, and mastery. I dug deep. Through therapy and reading I have done on trauma recovery, the clarion understanding I have taken away is that the twin pillars of shame and resulting secrecy that serve to facilitate this sycophant relationship are more psychologically deleterious than the actual violation. Breaking the perverse bond of duty, fidelity and protection that had beeen groomed in me with him and eschewing the role of secret keeper is the most direct route I know to healing and reclaiming myself.

Being his secret keeper kept me locked inside. The twisted compact isolated me. I felt duty bound to keep the secret. He had made me feel special; I could not betray him. Guilt sealed my silence and slowly erased the lines of decorum and comportment that had outlined my life and behavior. When I wasn't intoxicated by the attention, I experienced deep shame and fear. I believed, through his reinforcement, that I had caused this to happen and there was seemingly no route out, only resignation and downward spiral.

There was no incentive on his part to give me up. I would prove my loyalty and gratitude through self abuse, meeting him at times and places convenient to his busy schedule, engaging in sexual behavior that displayed submission and worthlessness in his office, outdoors on the grounds of the former state hospital, always paying the way for him. Though there were times I felt used for my money, attention, and sexual favors, I thought it was part of my growth that I had lifelong resisted of allowing vulnerability, trusting another and opening up. I would tell myself I had to be braver and open up even more. He had the power to calm me and cure me. His house of mirrors reflected the positive attributes in me that I had longed to have acknowledged. I thought I was healing through this experience.

Reframing the situation was impossible because he was the only person I could talk to about my lingering doubts and loosening contact with my soul and self. Only he existed, my family and friends no longer a part of my relational life. I was isolated from accessing any help that could extricate me. The focus of my attention was no longer resolving my own issues and establishing a healthy life, it became him, his relationship problems, his loss of license and vocation, his lifelong experience of female rejection and his healing through our sexual relationship. I became a surrogate healer. I felt valued, special and privileged.

I spent almost 20 years working with women in extreme duress who suffered some of the most depraved acts of cruelty and violence imaginable. Regardless of what they faced, I told them, "You must tell the truth. If you tell the truth it will set you free." I have been privileged to witness some of the most incredible acts of courage in a courtroom. Vulnerable children, often with little or no family support whose ties to protection and stability are untethered, have come forward. They bravely agree to speak to adults who are complete strangers seated as jurors. And while they do so, these adults, sitting as the community conscience, shift uncomfortably in their seats, unable to meet the gaze of the child, their own personal discomfort with details of sexual violence overriding their duty to observe witnesses, displaying their inability to remain present in time and space with wrongful sexual acts. And yet, the child persists and speaks their heart's truth, not yet cognitively equipped to fully appreciate the wrongfulness of the sexual violence that has been visited upon them. Against this paradigm of transparency, I cannot live in integrity with myself if I am not willing to do the same. No longer will I hide. No longer will I be ashamed. No longer will I engage in omission to protect. I cannot shrink from shame and fear of judgment when I have cajoled so many others to step into the unknown. I must live what I teach.

I am smart. I am shrewd. I am skeptical. Some would even say I am perpetually suspicious as a byproduct of years of prosecution. My heightened skills and acute perceptiveness failed to immunize me. I do not embody the characteristic features one would expect to find as a victim. That is a strong motivation in my coming forward. Through my work I was attuned to the subtle predatory seductive methods of sexual offenders. I did not see it in my own case. If it can happen to me, it can happen to anyone. I cannot abide in that.

The truth is that the very nature of the therapeutic process vitiates the sensibilities that protect us in real life. In order to engage in therapy, I had to suspend my characteristic

cautious distrust. Surrendering the armor of a prosecutor, I opened to vulnerability and painful excavating of hidden sorrow and unmet need. Growing trust and sharing secret thoughts became tantamount to handing a road map of abuse to my abuser. He knew my emotional history and weaknesses, he learned my hidden desires and fantasies, he knew the scents that triggered memories of safety and happiness, he knew the degree of my emotional neediness, and my burgeoning urgency as midlife approached. He had a moral, legal and ethical fiduciary duty to carefully tend and direct the process in ways that therapeutically supported not just my breaking open, but also my psychological growth ~ in healthy ways, consistent with my espoused values and desire for authenticity. Instead, he hijacked my narrative and quest for myself and grafted it onto himself for self gratification. He exploited my rendering of pain and used that insider knowledge to inveigle his way into my life. The nuance of the threat never registering with me.

I had made progress in therapy. But his action severed my growth and left me languishing in a state of nongrowth for five years. It was as if I had brought myself to crossroads and then set down a folding chair and sat...for five years....staring at the roads ahead, distracted from my quest, unable to move, paralyzed. Not only was this period characterized by nongrowth, but regression. While I had a sense that something was wrong, alone I could not assemble the right combination of forces to determine the truth and extricate myself.

Unable to tell what was happening, I sought solace and answers in books. My bookcases stand as a temple of inquiry and unbidden escape that I was searching for during that time. Lining my shelves are nearly every self help book published in the last 20 years. I knew something was deeply wrong but I could not foment the necessary clarity or emotional durability to identify what it was, never mind pull away. Like tilling soil, I turned over every aspect of myself, examining for the problem. Was it menopause? My hormones? My Marriage? My career? My family? I had made life choices, sometimes unconsciously, often choosing the regret I could live with rather than what my own heart's desire, and I was bewildered by how lost I felt in my own life. I took endless Oprah quizzes in search of my authentic life, authentic self and authentic career. When my thoughts would turn to this situation as the source of the problem I could feel the self loathing in the pit of my stomach but I was desired and held with an intensity I had never known, the constancy, consistency and intensity compelling. I was reluctant to release the only thing that made me feel good, even if it was temporary.

Slicing through the jumble, as I have returned to my right mind, it is evident I was searching for myself and faith. I had found myself in the middle of a life's crosshairs, being forced to define a new faith structure and way of living. I resisted and feared the change. I had also uncovered a deep reservoir of loneliness that I had been in denial was there. I was desperately seeking the missing pieces of myself I had left behind somewhere. Joy and me had been packed away like winter sweaters and put on a shelf and I was trying to understand why and how that had happened. The fact that as a trained therapist he corrupted my quest for myself, used it to shore his own inadequacies and gratify his sexual fantasies is inhumane. Using my psyche to feel young, potent, and desirous as he aged and lost his vocation was unconscionable.

For years I hid in an unholy self imposed exile. The secret slowly killing any shred of positive self image I had left. Surveying my life now and coming to terms with the depth of loss due to this violation has been extremely painful, cataclysmic in feeling some days. I was sent to him for healing. Years later my life was in shambles. All because I implicitly and unquestionably trusted a therapist.

Most harmful, my family has been altered in ways that will demarcate their life forever. My children lost the time and attention of a formerly highly engaged, loving mother. The nature of the abusive relationship was all consuming. It was as if our two identities were merged as one, in some kind of perverse spiritual cementing of souls. There came a time when I intellectually believed and physically felt I could not live without him. Only through him I lived. I could not breathe or rest without him. I was in physical pain when we were apart. My loss of self was complete. I came to believe that only in being completely powerless was I worthy. Examples of moments of surrender and proving my worthiness too painful and humiliating to render to paper.

Troublingly, though he is no longer a physical presence in my life, my children continue to suffer the reverberation of the harm. The psychological devastation I have experienced in the aftermath has been grave; suicidal ideation and planning being among the darkest episodes. Even as I pull away from that darkest space, I am a porous presence. I liken this experience to being a cancer patient who can't reveal to their family they are undergoing treatment. When the memories eclipse my life, they witness my emotional unraveling, mental distraction, inappropriate emotional affect, tearful sudden outbursts and depression. Yet I am constrained from providing a contextual narrative to assuage their concern, inspire stability and hope, and assist their understanding and integration of what is happening in our home and to their mother. Research has shown that when not provided an honest explanation, children will often create a story that involves self blame and in many instances devise egocentric explanations that self-blame and are in fact more damaging to them. Knowing this, I have applied a singularity of purpose to my recovery efforts in order to rapidly reestablish nurturance, vibrancy and flourishing in my home. This desire sustains my daily efforts.

The most basic visceral embodiment of motherhood is that of a protector. A mother bears a biological and evolutionary inclination in this regard. Combined with my vocational calling, I have defined my efficacy as a mother, in part, by my ability to protect my children from harm. Thwarting danger has taken various forms over the years. I childproofed my house by utilizing electrical outlet covers, assured that friends' homes did not contain firearms, established code words if my children ever felt unsafe at a sleepover. I was the hovering helicopter mother who tailed her children in the minivan as they rode their bikes one mile to school. Keenly aware of the randomness of victimization, I made critical life decisions such as community and school selection informed by safety assessments. Epically failing in the task to keep my children free from harm, knowing I am the harbinger who brought the harm into our home, is unbearable at times.

As a hearth is to a home, so was I to my family. I was the vision holder for their aspirations, budding interests, books to be read, victories to celebrate, difficulties to puzzle, and sorrows to nurse. As a mother, mindful attention, playfulness, and celebrating the ordinary details of their lives shaped my days. I sought to bring

celebration and joy to everyday living. I wanted to bring appreciation to the ordinary moments of our life, aware that this time, though filled with annoyances and exhaustion, would constitute the moments we would wistfully look back at in years to come.

Celebration of ordinariness and warm attentiveness were the hallmarks of my parenting life. It was not uncommon for my children to come home on a random Tuesday and find an elaborate scavenger hunt of cut out papers hearts lining the driveway and entrance to the house, leading to a pan of baked brownies. Dinner time was often themed. A hastily prepared meal of tacos accompanied by Spanish guitar music serenading us with Mexican straw hats for all. Dancing with Mom while cooking was a daily occurrence, adding levity to the mundane task of peeling potatoes or taking out the trash.

I was attuned to their unexpressed needs, the lengthened sigh, the slightly too long retreat to their bedroom, the unexpressed angst showing in clinched fists at the dinner table or the sharper than normal clip tingeing a retort. I was there to catch it all and receive its unfolding. This all ended. Replaced by absences from home and vacations, stoicism, diffidence, last minute take-out, hastily assembled meals. A joyless lassitude pervaded our house.

The losses extend to my career as I presently find myself unemployed and grappling to explain the gap of legal work and disappearance of all volunteer activity for the intervening five years. As I reengage with community, I am frequently greeted with remarks wondering where I have been and observations that I seem to have fallen off the face of the earth. I was enmeshed in meeting the needs of another. I left prosecution and worked below par teaching. A resulting toxic cocktail of sustained unworthiness, loss of self and frequent panic attacks have undermined my professional confidence. This, at a time when financial expenses for mental health services and legal counsel have risen.

I had aspired in my youth to living a virtuous and noble life, a lofty notion I found appealing in action that I only sometimes met, and far too frequently landed far from achieving, especially when I was tired, cranky or overwhelmed with work. While I would never have the capacity to build 2,509 libraries like Andrew Carnegie or a school for girls in Afghanistan, I did find a simple way to express my true nature. The particular expression of virtue that gave me the greatest delight was the manner in which I engaged with people in my everyday world. While I took pride in my professional vocation, I shined brightest in moments of exchange with strangers and people whose lives superfluously touched mine, but whose careful stewardship of the work responsibility entrusted to them contributed to the overall quality of my life: the mailman, the women who worked at the drycleaners. And so, I thanked my mailman for considerate placing of my packages by creating a poster with the kids "The World's Best Mailman" and left it for him in the mailbox. I brought cupcakes to the women at my local drycleaners for their unerring good service and positive regard, and I acknowledged the court security officers, who despite public wrath for invading people's sense of privacy, continued to perform their job with professionalism. I took particular glee in being a positive force in those moments. I, myself, was often taken aback when I was the recipient of such random kindness. Times I was stewing and brooding in my own personal storm, evincing cold reproach, were fortuitously transformed when I stepped into an elevator and received an unexpected act of kindness from a stranger who broadly smiled or uttered a positive

thought about the day. It never failed to powerfully effect me, allowing me to shrug off the present consternation I was straining to handle, and occasioning a reminder of the exceptional abundance of my life.

I retreated from all of this, ending the most joyful expression I know of who I am in the world. I was in a state of reviling myself. I no longer interacted with the outside world. My world had become the secret world I had entered into and could not leave. Each time I betrayed myself, lowering another rung. Documenting the wide chasm between my perceived self and embodied real self evidences the deep betrayal of myself for another.

While I had to hire counsel to author a letter advising him to refrain from contacting me, he endures in insidious ways inside me. The invasive stealth like nature of panic attacks I now experience are unnerving and disrupt my former sense of a just and ordered world. The concrete steps I have taken to keep him away (change my phone, erase my social media presence, change my daily routine) circumscribe my daily habits from grocery shopping to coffee shops I frequent until my life routine is barely recognizable as familiar. These efforts have been ineffectual to preclude the memories from inhabiting my body. While I can manage my thoughts to some extent, my body suffers.

The psychic toll reveals itself as frequent daily panic attacks wherein my body floods with searing heat that has at times fogged the glasses perched on my nose. The burning sensation in my chest leads to a racing heartbeat that crescendos with a feeling that the walls of my heart are collapsing in. I panic. It feels like my heart is giving way and is going to cease functioning. I suffer with distracted thinking, lost thought for large periods of time, an inability to concentrate and focus. Sleep disturbance has pervaded my nighttime routine for years. Recently, when I began to try sleep aids, the brief rest afforded me was punctuated by nightmares to the point where I dread the prospect of sleep more than the state of exhausted wakefulness. The lack of predictability and my capacity to handle the episodes while resting impede regaining a normal sleep regimen.

The orientation of my daily life has significantly altered as I avoid any possible location he may frequent. The end result is that my careful adherence to a conscripted life and reduced perimeter of vital engagement has created more isolation and loss of connection with humanity. Like the futility of trying to hold a beach ball under water, it seems the harder I try to find a safe free space, the more elusive it becomes and the futility of avoidance lays bare. The isolation I sought to wrest myself from only grows more expansive.

Trying to break the abusive relationship innumerable times, I would plead to him it "was killing my soul". In the research that has been shared with me, my recognition of the soul depth of harm of is spot on. The published research alternately refers to the effect of therapy abuse as "soul murder" and "soul robbing". I cannot adequately underscore the depth of harm wrought. My sense of safety in the world has been shattered. I am not safe in myself, having lost trust in myself, my intellect, my ability to make wise choices, my intuition, and my ability to safely assess people – all attributes I had counted as my most formidable skills developed through my career. I had been successful in my career not because of my intellect, but due to my ability to read people and understand them. Throughout my life, I had been highly attuned and guided well by my inner voice. It had

been a great source of strength throughout my entire life. It scares me and shatters my own sense of solidity that it was silenced, confused and so easily co-opted during this incident. I am not safe in the world, no longer trusting that others possess integrity to help me. While I understand that the power differential and fostered dependence created ripe conditions for subtle gradual giving way of all aspects of myself which led to complete absorption into another, it is humiliating to find myself in the vortex of those forces. However, with appropriate therapy and introspection, I have experienced what has felt like alchemy of the soul.

Impacting the most enduring relationship in my life, my relationship with God was truncated. I used to believe that the sacred dwells in all of us. Since youth, my daily habit had been to remain in frequent conversation with God throughout my day. I no longer feel part of His family. I no longer feel deserving...of grace, absolution and God's love. I doubt that God dwells in me, that relationship extinguished by this experience. Psychic self flagellation precludes my return to the fold.

In a quixotic attempt to regain grace, I made an appointment with a priest friend. On the appointed day, he was taken ill. The chapel I used to frequent was uninhabited with boarded up windows. I couldn't help but ruminate on the symbolism of being physically barred from relief and forgiveness. Searching for someone to forgive me, prevented from finding solace in the form of a specific person, I concluded the forgiveness I sought could only be found within me. Turning that power over to anyone else mirrored the powerlessness that had gripped me in therapy abuse. I laid prostrate on the altar, cried and spoke directly with God, laying bare my grief, shame and the deep betrayal of self and God. This desperate surrendering bridging the distance from God I had experienced.

The deeper understanding I took from that day was the ameliorative effect I attribute to speaking truth aloud to another being. The perceived value of oral recitation lay rooted in my Catholic upbringing and the ritual of the sacrament of confession. The redemptive value of narrative underlies the need to draft this letter. This letter being far more a verb, than a noun.

Moreover, the desperate search for a male patriarchical figure to stand as a gatekeeper for answers and absolution and the investment of that power in a singular male drew parallels with therapy abuse. I elevated the status of a priest, conferred rarefied wisdom and imbued priests with special god like powers rather than engage my own capacity for self forgiveness and self compassion. Instead, I sought external conferral of that salve. So too, in therapy, I conferred wisdom and specialized expertise to him. I attributed greater importance to his opinion and advice, which explains why I so often disregarded my inner voice in deference to his persuasions.

Telling anyone about this offense has been fraught with fear of rejection, humiliation, disbelief and misplaced blame. From prosecuting domestic violence cases, I know full well the entrenched public misperceptions about the ability of an abuse victim to leave and the unfounded blameworthiness of the victim. I have made a career of explicitly dispelling these myths. Telling anyone about this situation opens me up to rejection and judgment while I am still not wholly steady withstanding scrutiny with wizened self compassion and acceptance of myself. On the other hand, withholding this information from friends and

family separates me from humanity and relationship. Studies show that the most important predictor of happiness is the formation of close intimate relationships. The intentional withholding of this profound experience, which colors the prism through which I experience life, stands in the way of me creating a happy life.

What is also clear to me at the macro level is the inability of the profession to adequately police itself and the inherent flaw in an accountability system that relies solely on a victim's mental resilience to drive the process. It is widely acknowledged that victims of therapy abuse suffer deep levels of shame and evince exceptionally low rates of administrative disclosure. Only 4-8 % of survivors report exploitation. See also www.therapyabuse.com. Yet the system continues to rely on the well documented lack of victim capacity to overcome social isolation and shame as the sole avenue to hold a violator accountable. The exploitation of the victim thereby continues when the outcome rests on the victim's cooperation. Public policy acknowledged this harmful paradigm in domestic violence cases by creating a new paradigm for investigation that was not victim reliant. Studies show therapy abuse is acknowledged to occur on a semi regular basis. The system lacks nimbleness in its response and represents an inadequate safeguard for future abuse.

The dynamic of shame and judgment facilitates the abuse as well as fosters the underreporting of instances of boundary violations. Professionals with sufficient hubris to commit this offense have an innate sense for weakness in others when they select victims, and thereby a virtual assurance of secrecy that forestalls any risk of public admonishment. In my case, fear of shared secrets and uncharacteristic behavior, the result of distorted judgment, gave me pause for consideration. However, my years of prosecution and faith have imbued me with the certain knowledge that courage and truth slay fear every time.

In my own life, loved ones and family have advised me to never mention this publicly and remarked that I have gotten what I deserve. This display of ignorance and refusal to become educated about the dynamic of therapy abuse, while understandable on an intellectual level, sears one's heart. It underscores why most women won't come forward. In an odd twist, those same losses in my life guide me back to myself. As Wendell Berry writes, "I am blessed choosing again what I chose before."

The word "brave" means "ready to face and endure danger or pain; showing courage". I used to think I was brave when I stood in a courtroom and prosecuted particular heinous criminals, a man who had set fire to a woman searing her face and large portions of her body. But this experience completely redefined the word brave for me, perhaps because the potential loss I face is intensely personal. At this juncture, I have lost my former life and the person I was, but I remain. Simply standing. That is brave.

It is a rare day when my first waking thought isn't that I should kill myself. And then I choose. I make a conscious choice to actively fight for life each and every day. I seek out shame, try to face the shadows and allow my faith to ignite hope. My only strength being my willingness to bear the experience when everything in me wants to flee and die. Slowly I am filling in the portrait of myself again.

Trying to convince myself that this destruction will precede a period of renewal has been my fervent prayer. When facing challenging situations, my mother used to invoke the imagery that I was tempered steel. This experience has tested that former solidly embedded identity of strength and capacity to withstand forces of chaos. Research shows that the ability to integrate this new identity into Self is critical to recovery. Data also shows that full recovery is characterized by several factors, accepting mistakes in yourself is highest among them. So, despite condemnation, as I continue to mourn what I have lost and hold myself accountable for all the pain I caused, and with the knowledge that the arc of my life has been fundamentally altered, I resolve to incorporate this in a meaningful way, to reassemble my identity in a way that integrates this experience.

More than 23 states have specific statutory provisions prohibiting and criminalizing any and all sexual contact between patients and psychologists. Massachusetts is not one of them. I am requesting you invest resources to correct this legislative oversight. There is precedent for this action. In Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 268 Section 21A, the legislature crafted a specific statutory prohibition criminalizing any and all sexual contact between employees of "penal institutions" and inmates. The legislative history explains that due to the inherent imbalance of power, and the custodial nature of care rendered, consent to engage in sexual relations between jail employees and prisoners, despite being the age of majority, can never be knowingly and freely given. The same principles of power imbalance and disparity in vulnerability define the patient/therapist relationship. These differentials are even more potent in the patient/therapist relationship. Therapists, unlike prison guards, are educated and trained to foster and utilize their position of trust to influence and sway patients. Thus, the abusive misuse of that trust and dependency is even more violative and flagrant than prison guard misbehavior, and deserving of criminalization.

The benefit to codifying a specific prohibition against sexual contact between therapists and patients is deterrence. As the number of successful revocation hearings compared to survey data of incidents of therapy abuse occurring reveal, the present system of bringing violators to accountability allows flagrant violations to go unpunished. A specific statute publicly condemning the action will serve as a significant deterrent to those tempted to violate boundaries. Penal codes serve many functions: deterrence, removal, rehabilitation. The culture of victim reliant investigations of professional boundary violations must be replaced with strengthened tools to protect patients' vulnerability.

I understand the reticence to engaging with this issue. But this behavior, if only punished with an administrative loss of license, erodes public trust in the discipline of psychology. If you don't act to change this situation who will?

This is a woman's issue.

90 % of sexual violence occurring by therapists occur between male therapists and female patients. For every one of me there are many more women behind me, afraid, isolated, living out their lives in shame. Data show only 17% of women fully recover from therapy abuse, an appallingly low rate of healthy positive outcomes. If I successfully prosecuted only 17% of my cases I would be hastily fired. This is not a satisfactory outcome when something can be done to achieve better results. This isn't cancer treatment where the

curative measure is unknown. This public health problem is a lack of commitment to publicly face a nasty hidden truth that occurs across the Commonwealth: Therapists and health professionals sexually violate patients. Their power and prestige insulate them.

In 1989, The Boston Globe did a feature on the harmful impact of therapy abuse on victims. Twenty five years later nothing has changed. No legal accountability. Sexual abusers are quietly sidelined from the profession free to engage in similar behavior under another guise. Administrative penalties have done little to vanquish this problem. It is time for a new approach.

Only learning in the aftermath of my own experience that there was a dynamic known as "therapy abuse", I staggered in the wake of the harm. The obliteration of self that occurs makes an attempt to rebuild a foundation of truth and assurance for life an extraordinary act of faith, not faith in a particular god as a refuge or a system of beliefs that I could belong to or that would provide surety and protection from the vicissitudes of life, but faith in myself and my own strength and that the coarse of life would carry me forward even when I couldn't take a step. While therapy stabilized me, it has been the benevolence of faith that has sheltered me and pointed the way to possibility. Left with nothing to rely on, nowhere to go, I relied on something deep in my heart to provide a reason to live. It was very distant and barely discernible or audible, but it was there, a glimmering possibility that the who of who I am is bigger than this moment. It has been faith that has allowed the opening for self love, compassion, and clear thinking, seeing and speaking. The labeling and handling of this behavior as a "boundary violation" subject only to administrative law recourse is a tidy professional label applied from an intellectual distance that demeans the very real mental and emotional damage victims suffer.

In all other contexts, acts of sexual abuse are treated as criminal offenses leading to public prosecution and sex offender registration. Sexual abuse committed by therapists in the confines of their private offices is minimized and condoned when excepted from legal punishment as a mere boundary violation. Indeed the failure to codify this behavior as criminal crafts an exception for sexual abuse to occur by rogue therapists without redress. Those likely to offend are given legal carte blanche to sexually abuse. Victims feel shame, complicity and fear coming forward. The law needs to durably recognize the root of that shame - that consent to engage in sexual acts by a patient can never be knowingly and intelligently given due to the palpable power differential and influence that the therapist has over a patient. This deviation of behavior is an abuse of power, betrayal of trust and purposeful distortion of influence to accomplish sexual self gratification. Someone's penis in your mouth is not a boundary violation. It is criminal. I have met other victims and am buoyed by my shared humanity and stunned by the parallels in narrative. I know criminal behavior and this was tantamount to robbery and sexual abuse. It was as insidious, manipulative and damaging as getting hijacked and sexually assaulted. My mind was hijacked, my life robbed, and the sexual misconduct sexual abuse.

In all the years I attended sexual violence conferences across the country I never once heard this topic discussed. The paucity of discussion reveals our public unease with the topic. Highly trusted, well educated health professionals get a pass when it comes to scrutiny as sexual offenders based on their station in life. Have we learned nothing with the unfolding world wide priest pedophile scandal? Everyone should be held to the same standard. Domestic violence, child sexual abuse and mental health problems all suffered public stigma as acceptable topics in the public domain. Therapy abuse and abuse by health professionals are ripe for resolution.

In my own case, I couldn't seek administrative prosecution. I don't want any contact with him. He is 68 years old now and will not likely reapply for his license at this late juncture in life. Moreover, the mental and emotional harm of contact with him would be more detrimental than the pyrrhic administrative victory revoking his right to reapply. But I do want the problem of therapy abuse to be known and addressed. The legal system is hardly a panacea for resolving such complicated matters. The process can be just as brutal and filled with revictimization. However, I am sure you will agree that the sole tool of victim reporting, even if assiduously applied, is a weak deterrent. What I do seek to inspire is public education and awareness, in hopes that other women experiencing the same situation can be spared the utter devastation of self and life. The threat of criminal sanctions would heighten awareness of the ripple effect of the violation, and send a clear message of zero tolerance.

I am working to promulgate such legislation and would appreciate your support and input. I have drafted model legislation. Emotional and psychological loss will continue unabated if the system does not respond and change. The emotional and mental damage is too steep.

In spite of isolation, shame, suffering, grief, smothered doubt, loss of self, In spite of defilement, disorder and disquietude, loss – everyone, everything and safety, In spite of silent bedfellows, tension crackling, permeating, a bracing cold heart, silence, In spite of the pressure of prevailing social norms, giving up identity a lifetime spent building, In spite of fear of public unmasking, professional death, separation from humanity, In spite of a void, emptiness, betrayal, In spite of it all, I remain.

What made me most afraid has led me back.

Herein lies the gift in the wound, the sweetest victory is myself.

Respectfully,

Mary Beth Ogulewicz

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women Public Hearing

Pioppi Room, Jacob Edwards Library, Southbridge, MA Thursday, February 26, 2015, 4:30 pm

Present: Commissioners: Victoria Budson, Chair; Linda Cavaioli; Marianne Fleckner; Mary Kassler; Margot Parrot; Lauren Scribi; Mary-dith Tuitt. Worcester CSW Commissioners: Sheila Aleman; Chantal Bethea; Susan Lewandowski; Randy Zanka. Also, Director Jill Ashton.

Chair Victoria Budson welcomed everyone and the commissioners each introduced themselves.

TESTIMONY

Michelle Ortiz, Family Liason, Westwood School. She is "speaking for herself." Her school has 450 children. She sees how hard teachers work and their many frustrations. Most of the kids are from Puerto Rico, so she sends communications home in Spanish and English. Many parents do not speak English and cannot help their kids. A lot of the kids need counselling, but there is a 6-month waiting list. There's also a lot of parental apathy. Only 25-35 families come to events. How do we get families more involved? DTA tells her mothers that they need to do community service hours in order to receive benefits, but where do we send them if they don't speak English? She doesn't know where to send these parents and kids for help. Also, they need a DCF referral to get help, and that requires a parent to go in person and sign a voluntary consent form. Once there, the parent may not even be able to find the interpreter. She has worked here for ten years, and she is surprised at how many agencies want to do the right thing, but nothing happens. She pointed out that she was the only Spanish speaker in the audience, and she wonders how to get more people involved.

Margo Chevers, Grandparents Commission. She is a grandparent (and great grandparent) raising grandchildren. Ten thousand grandparents in Mass have sole custody of a grandchild. She said that taking custody is a choice. She lives in Wales, and when she took custody, she didn't have anything when she picked them up in New Bedford. She started a grandparent support group and discovered that 20% of the preschool class was being raised by grandparents. Many times the burden falls on the grandmother, who will quit her job because she cannot afford day care. She found that trying to tap into resources caused problems, as she makes too much money. She told of one grandparent who took in seven children with no food, but she could not get food stamps that month because the parents had already received them. Drug addiction is the biggest reason for grandparents raising grandchildren, with mental health issues next. The children may also have mental disease. She asked her group of grandparents how many have had a major illness, and it was 70%. These kids need therapy, they have abandonment issues. Also, how can they afford to send the grandchildren to college? She told of another grandparent who took in a sick grandchild and ended up having to sell the house to afford care. The drug issue is the big issue, with so many drugs on the street. She has a pastor in her grandparents group, also business people. Another problem is domestic violence: one in four women and growing. Women are objectified in the media. She wishes more women would step forward. Too many women don't recognize they are in an abusive relationship. Abuse is about control and power, and the public needs to understand this. She also runs an abuse group. They put out a flyer on recognizing an abusive relationship. Laws need to protect the abused, not the abuser. We need to get into the schools in preschool and stop bullying and help elementary kids to recognize it and to talk about what is a healthy relationship in high school and college.

Sue Lewandowski, Worcester CSW. She grew up with domestic violence and was also date raped. Her issue: mental health parity. When kids are in this situation, they are more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs. With early diagnosis, they can have better coping skills. We need a good provider list, especially for eating disorders. Just going into a facility for 2 weeks and going back into the same situation won't work. With more (mental health) parity, there would be more resources.

Suzanne Kate Beninsky, Client Services Director, Your Life Matters Pregnancy Center. Abused women feel so trapped. They need an emergency shelter in town. Most of the girls they serve are single and don't have family resources. Kids in school are taught sexual risk avoidance, but it does not sink in. Girls just think they have to have sex. There are also communication barriers, as some of the girls cannot read English.

Brenda Ennis, MCSW Unsung Heroine. She said the MCSW "changed her life." She has been on the School Committee for 4 terms now. She just came off being a State Representative candidate, and the rest of the pool of candidates was all men. Every city and town has needs, and there is nothing more powerful than women who are united and collaborative and who get together to focus on specific needs. She has realized that she has resources she didn't even know she had. She was the wrong gender and party in this past election. Everyone in this room has resources, and you know how to tap them. The Commission needs to put together a pipeline. We need to advocate in a way that is successful. Women follow through better than men because we have empathy and can rally folks. She's available to help.

{Victoria Budson, MCSW Chair. We are only as strong as the women who stand with us. Women's Advocacy Day will be on May 7 at the State House, and the State House is <u>your</u> house. The needs of women and girls are the majority. Also, there are many regional commissions now.}

Heidi, Pathway of Change. She runs a rape crisis center with offices in Worcester and Fitchburg, and the Southbridge Library also gives them space. Not all towns will allow her educators to go in. When they do go in, the "numbers" (of reported cases) go up because more people come forward. Her new strategy: do education with the adults. Their services are free, they provide training for volunteers, and they have a whole series of trainings, not just one time. We do need to start with the little ones, teaching them about healthy relationships, because this is everyone's problem.

Lynn Simons, formerly ran Southbridge Community Connections. "Every system that's important to kids is broken." What is most important for women to focus on is education. For a lot of poor white kids, English is a second language. There are a lot of lousy teachers. Kids are not prepared for anything. Women need to get more involved in the grassroots of education. She found that 13% of kids had tried suicide and 70% had been bullied or were depressed. The system is so punishing of women. She said that what's wrong with America is: "egos, erections and entitlements." We need to be in the streets, and we need to do a better job with our daughters and sons. Nothing is crueler than MCAS. If you fix education, you fix everything. She is currently writing a book titled, "The American Nightmare." She asked us to "take education on as your fight."

Stacy Tucker, South Central WIC. Her organization covers 35 towns. She read a letter from her Director, Karen Conway. In terms of health care, there has been a vast improvement in women's and family services. Areas of concern: the need for local public transportation, with mothers walking in the streets with children. Also, affordable housing: buying or renting is almost impossible, while families on Section 8 are either in motels or on waiting lists. Drug abuse: pregnant women are giving birth to drug addicted babies. There's a need for funding for education and for activities for young people. Speaking for herself, Stacy is PTO President. Sometimes there are only one or two people at meetings. Why are we not participating? In the WIC office, it is difficult to get people to workshops. There are only six WIC offices for 35 towns.

{Chair Victoria Budson noted that today it's very hard for families with working parents. Commissioner Mary Kassler said that other social services have also cut back on offices, and it was found that the WIC-mobile was costly and ineffective.}

Ann Godrow, Chief of Staff for Rep. Peter Durant, 6th Worcester District (including Southbridge). Ann worked in the courts on domestic violence issues before joining Rep. Durant's legislative office. She was a CASA volunteer with teen moms for 6 years. She went to work for Rep. Durant because "he cares."

Sheila Alemon, Worcester CSW. There are transportation issues all over and this is an immediate need, including getting federal assistance to clear walkways. A young woman was killed by a snow plow in Fitchburg recently. She spoke about a program called "Kiley's Kids" in Leominster, in which young people pack food for school kids for the weekend. There is an exponential need. These programs help. She grew up in Northern Maine, where she used to pick potatoes. She got a grant to get her education. WIC helped her when she had children. These programs really help.

{Commissioner Marianne Fleckner noted that some communities are buying 12-14 passenger vans for local transportation using the meals tax.}

Randy Zanka, Worcester CSW. She lives in Northbridge and said some of the services are there (WIC, DCF). She teaches freshman English at Quinsigamond Community College, and has found that many students are coming in without the writing skills they need. All women need these skills. At age 13-14, girls lose confidence, so there is a need for confidence programs. Access to affordable education is needed for women, in the form of some sort of award that they don't have to pay back. Students come out of college with so much debt and the jobs don't pay enough to get out of debt. She also serves on the Northbridge School Committee, and she said that ESL classes are expensive and underfunded. We need to keep advocating for funding of programs.

{Commissioner Linda Cavaioli mentioned the idea of volunteer programs to get rid of college debt. She thanked the Worcester Commission for bringing people out and Margaret for hosting us at the Library.}

END OF HEARING

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women Public Hearing

YWCA of Haverhill, Haverhill, MA Wednesday, March 25, 2015, 4:30 pm

Lina Sanchez – Lowell Community Health Center

- This center offers OB/GYN and other health services. Dentist will be offered in the future
- The center has helped over 135 women, with or without insurance, in clinics

Renee McGuire – YWCA of Haverhill

- Rates of domestic violence in later life have increased. Domestic violence include physical, sexual, financial, and emotional abuse. Late Life Domestic Violence occurs in all communities and affects people of all backgrounds.
- Survivors of domestic violence are susceptible to homelessness, isolation, and mental health issues. It is harder to spot these older survivors of domestic violence than younger demographic. Most women are not aware of the resources that can help them.
- The only national study that researched elder abuse found that "the vast majority of abusers were family members, most often adult children, spouses, partners, and others." In addition, mentally ill or substance-dependent family members that "feel burdened by their caregiving responsibilities abuse at much higher rates than those who do not."

Sally Struble -- YWCA of Greater Lawrence, Oversees Sexual Assault Services

- Told a story of a mother whose daughter had been sexually assaulted. The judge told the mother that her daughter did not qualify under Chapter 258E (protective order) because her daughter had only been assaulted once. The judge was wrong in telling her this; the mother spoke up and told the judge, "Actually, I believe the law now allows one-time victims to receive this protective order."
- Section 7 of Ch260 prohibits Police Departments from releasing sexual assault reports without permission. Police Dept. continue to release these reports to public media but do not give survivors copies of these reports. This is crucial to prove to courts that the survivor was sexually assaulted and filed a report. This is especially an issue for immigrant women.
- Court training is necessary to ensure that survivors are compensated and receive the protection they need. Police departments also must abide by the law because more and more survivors refuse to file reports to the police, with the knowledge that police may not acknowledge them, discriminate, or mistreat them.

Luz Rosado – YWCA Of Greater Lawrence, Health Ambassador

- Health insurance and proper health care is a major issue in the Lawrence community. There are high rates of poverty in the area but low rates of health insurance, despite MA having the highest rate of insured people. Many people do not know how to enroll in health insurance.
- There is a lack of medical professions who can communicate in the patients' native language.
- There needs to be more funding, awareness of cancers that affect women (breast, cervical, etc.), support groups, and mental health providers.

Yashira Robles – YWCA of Greater Lawrence, Coordinator of Women's Health Advocacy Services

- There has been an increase of Haverhill residents seeking assistance at Lawrence location.
- Provider-patient communication needs improvement, especially in regards to language barriers. Patients often don't understand the medical jargon, their family members may come to translate but cannot translate medical jargon, and patients do they know that they can request a translator for their appointment(s).
- Screening for disease may be covered by insurance, but there is most often not coverage for reading the screening (\$270-500). This may deter patients from screening in the first place. 98% of cancer is preventable if it is detected early.
- There must be increase opportunities in health care for people of color. There must also be a higher demand for bilingual staff.

Stephanie Bellapinata – Haverhill High School senior

- Shared her observation of the low rates of Latino students enrolled in AP classes at school. Many Latinos become blue-collar workers, and Stephanie believes they need resources to know about alternative options. "Youth can speak but few choose to speak."
- Guidance counselors juggle hundreds of students, so cannot give attention to all of them equally. There are also no career development services affiliated with the school that steer Latino students into STEM, internships, etc.
- The teachers are not culturally diverse
- Some immigrant children are placed in the wrong classes or level of classes so they are steered into bluecollar work from there

Flor Maldonado – YWCA of Greater Lawrence

• Very difficult to garner support from police departments when there are sexual assault cases

Kate Johnson – Jeanne Geiger Women's Crisis Center

- Probate and family courts in Salem and Lawrence further marginalize survivors of domestic violence in that they do not gain custody of their children.
- Told an anecdote about a domestic violence survivor who sought to get custody of her children. Her children were also victims of the husband's abuse; the husband got custody of her children. The judge blamed the woman for her children's abuse. This is not okay!
- MA is one of two states in US that has not passed a law to protect survivors in family court. This is necessary to protect women seeking emergency provision, jurisdiction across states, etc.

Jody Picone – Dept. of Children and Families, Social Worker

- There is a heroin epidemic in the community. Mothers are abusing heroin, dying, and their children are left without mothers
- Populations that take in these children are mostly an older demographic, responsible for 1-4 children at a time.
- There needs to be awareness about substance abuse in the community.

Maricelis Ortiz – YWCA of Greater Lawrence, Director of Children and Family Services

• It is often women that make up early education, although they are qualified to teach middle-high school levels. Early education has better pay. Women deserve compensation at competitive rates.

Carmenza Bruff

- Expressed concern about minority women's economic status because the current system does not allow mobility.
- There is a language barrier, financial barrier in terms of receiving a college education, and lack of support systems like childcare services.
- Women often take job offers below their level of qualification
- Immigrant women must transfer educational credits or receive training again in USA
- University costs are inaccessible to these women. Health education is also lacking in public schools.

Arelis Huertas – YWCA of Greater Lawrence

- 16-24 year old women are experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence. This is triple the national average. ¹/₄ of high school girls have been victims of physical or sexual abuse.
- Survivors, especially minors, need access to legal resources that do not necessitate a guardian signature or notification.
- As much as schools advocate for anti-bullying, they must advocate for anti-violence/domestic violence. 80% of parents do not think domestic violence is an issue, and that is an issue in itself.

Eridania Nieves

- "I truly believe that a major issue affecting women in our community is directly tied to a lack of information and opportunities regarding financial literacy. Examples include: starting a business; acquiring credit; opening bank accounts; saving for retirement; insurance; financial assistance for education, etc."
- "This is frequently a reason women remain in abusive and unhealthy relationships and/or remain in government subsidized programs."

Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women Public Hearing

Balfour Community Room, Attleboro Public Library, Attleboro, MA Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 4:30 pm

Lori Sousa- New Hope

- From July to December of 2014, there was a significant increase in demand for direct services, including counseling, hot line services and batterer's intervention.
- Safe and immediate housing is the biggest need. There is a breakdown in the affordable housing pipeline. New Hope's shelter guests are spending an average of 85 days in shelter because there are less housing options for them to move on to. As a result, individuals in immediate crisis situations are unable to get into shelter as quickly because there is less room.
- Healthcare network needs expansion. The majority of primary care providers who accept Masshealth are not accepting new patients, which denies individuals access to healthcare.
- Transportation assistance, employment and childcare are also very much needed, and all related. Increasing the minimum wage and establishing equal pay for men and women would have a dramatic effect.

Sandi Carter-Brown - RAINN

- 40% of sexual assault victims are under 18, and 80% are under 30. 68% of incidences of sexual assault go unreported, and 98% of perpetrators will spend no time in jail.
- Discussed devastating effects of sexual assault on victims- including PTSD, depression, self-harm and more
- We must not minimize the damage that been done, nor blame the victims.

Joan Ricci- The Literacy Center

- The Literacy Center serves many immigrant individuals and families. Many of the women that they serve have been sexually assaulted, but do not recognize that it is sexual assault. They identify this behavior as though it is "something they have to put up with".
- Coming from an outside language and culture is often a huge barrier for these women. They see many mothers who have trouble communicating with their children, who don't speak their parent's native language. They also see women who are taken advantage of by employers, and who have no choice but to work for minimum wage or under the table jobs.
- The Literacy Center serves students from 54 countries; it is a challenge to have staff representing all of those areas.

Kelly Fox- Council for Children

- As a Certified Financial Planner and as a Board member of the Council for Children, she supports women in a variety of situations, including those who have gone through divorce, been widowed or are starting their own businesses. There needs to be more opportunity for financial literacy education for all.
- It is empowering to know how to manage one's money, especially for women who stay stuck in unhealthy situations due to financial restrictions.

June Fleischman- City of Attleboro Health Department

- Housing is #1, #2 and #3 barrier to assisting low-income individuals and families, especially those under 60. 80% of low-income housing is for seniors. 3 bedroom housing units have virtually no turnover; the wait to be placed in a unit can be over 5 years.
- People have ties to this area, such as family, friends, schools for special needs children, but they can't afford or have any chance to afford housing in Attleboro.
- Shelters have effectively become transitional housing, and it is not a safe environment for children emotionally or physically.
- Even with mobile vouchers and employment, people can't find a landlord to accept the vouchers, and they are stuck without housing.
- It is a challenge to even get to housing resources. The closest locations to receive housing support are in Fall River and Kingston, and it is so difficult to coordinate transportation there from Attleboro.

Irene Frechette- St. Vincent de Paul Society

- There is a huge need for graduated decrease in public benefits. Individuals who find employment are almost immediately cut off from public assistance, and this does not allow time to find childcare or transportation.
- There are currently 2 hotels in Attleboro housing homeless families, primarily women and children. They are staying in 1 bedroom motel rooms with a microwave and a mini-fridge, and this is not the correct answer to the situation.
- State should be working with community and faith based organizations to solve the problem. It costs \$28,000 annually to house a homeless family in a motel, which could go much farther in a model like St. Vincent de Paul's for example.
- Motels are in remote locations that do not allow families to be able to go out and search for housing or employment, therefore they remain stuck.
- Transportation is also a huge obstacle. The buses do not run past 6:00pm or on Sundays, and people often do not have cars. This greatly limits ability to be able to work because of their restricted hours.
- Unaccompanied youth legislation was passed, but it was an unfunded mandate.
- Individuals are coming out of prison with no resources, and need temporary housing instead of being put out on the streets.
- Top priorities: Preventing homelessness before it occurs, transportation, childcare vouchers, gradual decrease in benefits.

Valerie Bassett- The Women's Fund

- Desires to increase the percentage of women earning a living wage, and monitor economic status of women in the region.
- Women and girls in New Bedford have higher levels of education than male counterparts, yet their wages are much lower.
- Overall wage gap of full time workers is \$10,000 annually. Median wage for women in New Bedford is \$33,000 and in Fall River is \$25,444. It is \$19,000 for single mothers.
- Their goal is a living wage of \$54,000-\$64,000.
- Very high percentage of women who are living in poverty and/or "just getting by". Currently, 1 in 4 women are living under Federal poverty line. 9% of working women in New Bedford are living in poverty in New Bedford, and 12% in Fall River.
- Education is focus for getting ahead. Advocating to change requirement that only allows for one year of education while receiving childcare voucher benefits. Many women are more interested in childcare vouchers than cash benefits because childcare is so expensive.
- Affordable housing and childcare are top priorities.

Waleska Ortiz-Jacome- Life Works

- Was able to graduate with Associate's degree and make Dean's list while raising her young daughter with the support of Life Works program. Access to childcare vouchers and transportation resources were crucial to her success.
- She is now attending at 4 year university, and has taken advantage of childcare voucher program to become a full time student. Her aim is to give back and support foster care youth with her Human Services degree.

Rep. Betty Poirier

- Hears often about women's issues, and homelessness in particular.
- Homelessness is the scourge that is not being treated properly. The solution is in combining resources and working together.
- Recently appointed to Commission on Homelessness, motel rooms are not the solution. We need to increase access to childcare vouchers and support for domestic violence victims.
- Students in Attleboro are studying for GED, but can't get to testing site or graduation due to lack of transportation. Attleboro has recently been renamed as a testing site, which is great news.
- Situation is a work in progress, we constantly strive for improvement.



Massachusetts & Bristol County Commissions on the Status of Women Public Hearing Testimony, April 15, 2015 Attleboro Public Library

About New Hope:

New Hope, Inc., founded in 1979, is a 501c3 nonprofit organization providing 54 cities / towns in Massachusetts with "full-spectrum care" to survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Our mission is to break the cycle of violence by "ending domestic and sexual violence in our communities." New Hope's spectrum of care includes: Prevention Education; Crisis Intervention; Shelter; Counseling (adult & children); Transitional Living; Family Visitation and Batterer Intervention. Our programs seek to illuminate a path to violence-free self-sufficiency for each of our clients, regardless of race, age, gender or sexual orientation.

Demand for Services:

In the first six months of our current fiscal year (i.e. July 1 – December 31), New Hope has seen a significant increase in demand for direct services across five program areas:

- Counseling Services (54% increase)
- Emergency Shelter Central Region (43% increase)
- Hotline Calls (17% increase)
- Batterer Intervention Program (42% increase)
- Visitation (non-custodial parent & safe exchange) Programs (24% increase)

Many more victims of sexual and domestic violence never seek services. The MA Office of Victim Assistance reports that 74% of victims seeking redress in the courts had no contact with a victim service agency prior to coming to court and those who do come to court have usually suffered years of abuse prior to seeking court intervention. When these numbers are considered, the magnitude of the problem has serious implications for our communities and speaks to the unmet need for increased services.

Primary Observation:

The availability of safe, immediate and affordable, permanent housing is the single largest barrier to self-sufficiency facing New Hope's clients. Availability, however, is only one piece of the housing puzzle. The far more complicated piece is the interconnected nature of all public social services -- meaning, success in the housing arena is dependent upon the performance and reliability of transition assistance benefits, public transportation, employment, healthcare, mental healthcare and child care services. Across New Hope programs we see clients' progress impeded by the very mechanisms put in place to facilitate their success. Listed below are a few of the key hurdles experienced by New Hope clients.

Breakdown of the Affordable Housing Pipeline

The current lack of supply in permanent affordable housing results in an untenable demand for temporary housing further down the service chain. For example, when a woman flees domestic violence she moves into an emergency housing shelter - designed to host guests for 30-45 days - before moving into an affordable housing program. However, in 2014, New Hope clients averaged **85 days** in shelter, thereby leaving our organization unable to shelter new clients in immediate danger.

Clients who find it particularly challenging to transition to permanent housing are single women, as most affordable housing programs are reserved for women with children. Similarly, the majority of transitional living programs for domestic violence survivors are available only to individuals currently living in shelters, which creates a disincentive to move on from shelter.

New Hope supports expansion of housing stabilization funds to prevent homelessness caused by domestic violence

Access to Healthcare Services

Many of our clients report that while they are provided insurance benefits through MassHealth, a large number of the approved providers in the area are not accepting new patients, thereby rendering the coverage ineffective and impracticable. This applies to both primary and mental healthcare.

New Hope supports an expansion of the existing provider network.

Sustainable Employment

The challenges to maintaining employment for a woman living in shelter and/or transitional housing are tremendous. Beyond relying on public transportation for long commutes, many available jobs pay minimum wage, which do not offer a viable pathway out of poverty. Add to the equation access to reliable and affordable child care assistance and the challenges become that much more overwhelming.

New Hope supports an increase to the state minimum wage and equal pay for men and women.

Testimony from Sandi Carter-Brown Attleboro Public Library April 15, 2015

Hello everyone, I just like to take a moment to read some latest statistics from RAINN, (rape and incest National Network.)

RAINN is the world's largest anti sexual assault organization

In the United States

44% of sexual assault victims are under the age of 18

80% are under age 30

Every 107 seconds another American is sexually assaulted

There's an average of 293,000 victims (age 12 or older) of sexual assault each year

68% of sexual assaults are not reported to police

98% of rapists will never spend one day in jail

Approximately two out of three assaults are committed by someone known to the victim

And 38% of rapists are friends or acquaintances

The effects of sexual assault are devastating, causing a myriad of problems, from post traumatic stress disorder, self harm such as cutting, flashbacks, eating disorders, depression, substance abuse, sexually acting out, and suicide.

I know of what I speak because I have survived sexual abuse in my lifetime, especially as a child and young woman.

Oppression of women is very obvious in many parts of the world. We in the United States are not immune to this. Malala Yousafzai from Pakistan stood up against the Taliban and was shot traveling home from school on October 9, 2012. She still advocates for the rights of girls to receive education, and the dignity that they deserve. To me, this young women is the definition of courage. Though oppression of women is not as blatant in the United States, we are still a very sexually violent country.

I am not naïve, nor am I a cynic. I would like to believe that we could eradicate violence against children and women from our tiny globe but sadly I do not. I do believe that we can improve the lives of many by working together with each other, our friends, our families, our loved ones, but we must be first be brave enough to look at ourselves, at our own issues and opinions, regarding sexual abuse. We must not minimize damage that has been done to us or to those near to us. We must never blame ourselves or the victims. Everyone in this room knows someone who has been sexually abused even though you may not be aware of it.

The undeserved shame of sexual abuse can literally kill one's soul. I personally have worked on my own healing process for over 30 years. I am grateful to be able to stand here today and speak without shame. I have scars but I am no longer broken.

I would like to finish hear today with a quote from Robert Browning I find very profound. And here's the quote

"The children are waiting for the world to deserve them"

Let us strive to make this happen.

Thank you



Valerie Bassett, Executive Director, the Women's Fund of Southeastern

Massachusetts * Remarks for the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of

Women Regional Hearing - Bristol County

April 15, 2015

- Good afternoon. My name is Valerie Bassett, and I am the Executive Director of the Women's Fund of Southeastern MA. We are a fund of the Community Foundation of Southeastern MA.
- Thank you for this opportunity to share with you the most critical issues for women and girls as we understand and experience them.
- This is our fifteenth year of raising funds to support women and girls in this
 region, focusing on greater New Bedford. Our mission is to promote the
 educational attainment and economic security of women and girls in the
 region.
- Joining us to accomplish our mission is a community of about 100
 volunteers, several hundred donor individuals and organizations, scores of
 previous grantees, over 50 organizations on a Task Force we are currently
 convening and about 70 women moving toward economic independence
 who are enrolled in one of two programs we fund and incubate, WISE and
 LifeWork.
- This last year, our Leadership Council sharpened the definition of our work; we are setting our sights on increasing the percentage of women earning a living wage.

- We are beginning to gather and share more data on the status of women in New Bedford, and to some extent, Fall River. So I'd like to speak today about what we've learned based on analysis that the UMass-Dartmouth Public Policy Center did for us for a report on women's education and earnings in New Bedford- as well as a brief analysis of women and poverty in New Bedford and Fall River.
- Women and girls in New Bedford are earning higher levels of education than boys and men, especially in terms of high school completion, but on through to graduate-level education.
- And yet, at every educational level, women are earning less than men. The
 overall wage gap between men and women working year-round, full-time in
 New Bedford and Fall River is about \$10,000.
- For people without a high school diploma, the salary gap is about \$12,000. It
 is \$15,000 for women with some college or an Associate's degree, and it
 shrinks to about \$2,000 for women with a four-year college degree or
 higher.
- The most compelling issue for us to date is the disproportionately high rate
 of women's poverty and single mother-led households in New Bedford and
 Fall River. One out of every four women in both cities is living in poverty.
- About 9 percent of employed women in Fall River are living at or below poverty level and about 12 percent of employed women in New Bedford.
- Half of the households in both cities are led by single mothers, and of those, about half live at or below poverty level. Many more women are struggling to make ends meet, even if they are living above federal poverty levels.
- We measure women's economic health by the living wage, or Economic Independence Index. By that measure, a household of one adult and two children needs somewhere between \$54,000-\$60,000 to cover all expenses.

- The median wage earned by women in New Bedford is only \$33,397. In Fall River, it is \$25,444. The median income for single mothers in New Bedford is only \$19,364.
- What are the implications of this for state-level policy priorities?
- For this region, in particular the urban centers, public benefits and policies that promote economic mobility for women are a top priority.
- The Women's Fund has convened a Task Force on Pathways for Women to a Living Wage to make recommendations about how, through state and local policy, we can fix the economic ladder for women, who are alone.
- We have just begun, and will look at issues like access to quality early
 education, the role of elementary and secondary education, post-secondary
 education and workforce development, and employer, wage and assetbuilding issues such as comparable pay for comparable work, paid family
 leave, minimum wage and Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Issues around access to affordable housing and homeownership, Department
 of Early Education and Care-subsidized programs, as well as TAFDC and its
 regulations disproportionately affect women in this region. So we will be
 paying close attention to the Senate's "Workfirst" initiative and other efforts
 to modify welfare.
- We look forward to sharing the Task Force recommendations this Fall, once they are developed.
- In the meantime, a busload of women from our region will be participating in Women's Advocacy Day, May 7. We will be speaking to our legislators about Equal Pay legislation as well as the need to invest more in early education and care and its access. The state is the biggest payer for child care in the South Coast, and the state investment - or lack thereof -- has a significant effect here.
- Thank you very much for your efforts to promote women's equity and for the opportunity to speak to you this evening.

My Speech for the Life Work

Hi, good even everyone, my name is Waleska Ortiz, I'm 31 years old and just graduation from Bristol Community College in May 31, 2014 as a is Human Service degree. I'm in junior at University Massachusetts Dartmouth as Psychology. I'm one of the participate at Life Work since spring 2014. Because of them I graduation at top Dean Students with strange A in all my classes in spring 2014 at Bristol Community College. I been in college for 10 years, I start in 2002 with I graduation from New Bedford high. I never thought I would been the first of my family to graduation from high and college. I was in Department Of Social Service. My mom abused me from top to bother. I got rape by my step father who raise me as his daughter because I never met my real dad. My step rape me since I was 11 years old until 14. I could not take any more so I told my read teacher what was going on. But DSS was in my life since I was 5 years old when went one my pre-school teacher saw my face and report it to DSS. I was one of the six children. My real older brother drown at the House Neck Beach.

Now I have a 5 years old daughter, her name is Virginia. Because of her I went back to college in 2011. I went to show my daughter, the life those not have the power, we have the power to change, and became better and show everybody that we are strong women and that no one will put as down. The Life work, help me get a day care for my daughter at Little People College, so I can finish my degree and graduation from BCC and go to a 4 years college. I had suggest but I'm here to succeed for me and my daughter and change the world and help foster kids. I know that I will finish college and go open a company for foster children and tell them they matter and, and just to listen because that all they need is love, care and most important to listen to them. And that is my dream.



Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women Annual Report June 2015

Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women - Members

Gloria Cabral- Westport co-chair
Jean Cotter-Fox, Freetown co-chair
Anne Dziura, New Bedford
Irene Duprey-Gutierez, New Bedford
Susan Lee, PhD,Fall River
Cyndi Marland, EdD, Dartmouth
Dianna Williams, North Easton
Eunice Soyun Yang, New Bedford

Accomplishments 2014-2015

Membership:

Bristol County CSW membership doubled to 8 members this last year. There is a diversity in members' professions and backgrounds that enhances the Commission's composition.

Hearings:

April 14, 2015 Equal Pay Day: several Commissioners in attendance

April 15, 2015 Attleboro Public Hearing: Two Commissioners in attendance. Commissioner Fox requested that Valerie Bassett, Executive Director of the Women's Fund of Southeastern Massachusetts attend and submit testimony, which she did, along with a participant in the Fund's pivotal and highly successful LifeWork Program. LifeWork helps single mothers obtain a college credential while providing a number of financial and emotional supports for the women as they conduct their studies.

Additional Activities:

November 5, 2014 Commissioners; Irene Duprey-Gutierez and Eunice Yang were part of a panel that did a presentation on **Domestic Violence**. Preparation for this panel, which included the District Attorney's Office and the Women's Center shelter, along with the Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women, involved months of preparation and planning. It was held at Greater New Bedford



Regional Vocational Technical High School for the Freshman class. The Superintendent has requested that the presentation/information session become an annual event for all incoming freshman classes. The Commission will extend invitations to other school departments going forward.

November 10, 2014, BCCSW and the Cape Cod and Islands Chapter met to discuss the *identified issues and membership. This interaction also promotes camaraderie and collaboration between regions. It is the mutual intention of both Commissions to continue these joint meetings, which have been conducted annually for several years.

In response to a disturbing and widespread billboard from Gulf Electricity, Dr. Susan Lee wrote an outstanding op-ed piece, which appeared in the New Bedford Standard-Times, the Fall River Herald News, and the Providence Journal. Following the printed article, Reverend Lee was interviewed on New Bedford's WBSM about the billboard and the disparaging and disrespectful manner in which Gulf Electricity portrays and objectifies women. The billboard featured a stiletto-clad female leg, clearly rising from a reclined position on a sofa to turn on a light switch. Rep. Carole Fiola (D-Fall River) also called on Gulf Electricity to remove the billboards, which appeared in Fall River, Boston, and throughout the Northeast. The company refused, indicating that the campaign constituted a "suitable and appropriate marketing tool." Kudos to Dr. Lee.

Commissioner Dianna Williams created a Google calendar account for all commissioners to see upcoming events and meetings.

Commissioner Jean Fox has partnered with Women's Fund of Southeastern Massachusetts Executive Director Valerie Bassett to co-chair a Task Force for Women to a Living Wage, which has been meeting over the course of 2015 and will culminate with a series of recommendations in the fall. Guest speakers and members include regional leaders in both the public and private sectors, including local colleges, nonprofits, businesses, and K-12 superintendents. Professor Michael Goodman of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth have added depth, knowledge, and perspective to the ongoing monthly discussions.

Commissioners Irene Dupyey-Gutierez and Cyndi Marland are working on the BCCSW Public Relations team in order to get more information to the public and educate them on the Commission's work. They intend to develop a series of pieces for print media as well as local cable access.

April 29, 2015 Commissioners Jean Fox, Irene Duprey-Gutierez, Cyndi Marland, Dianna Williams and Eunice Yang worked with Our Sister's School (New Bedford) on a presentation about the evolution of women's rights and the bills that the MCSW will be asking Advocacy Day attendees to support when meeting



with legislators. The students were briefed on each of the proposed bills, and they were given guidance on how to advocate for the bills on Beacon Hill. The students sent thank-you notes to the Bristol Commissioners for the class work and the Advocacy Day experience.

Students at Global Learning Charter Public School also received some in-school preparation for Advocacy Day with BCCSW partners from the YWCA of Southeastern Massachusetts and the Women's Fund of Southeastern Massachusetts

May 14, 2015 Advocacy Day at the Boston State House, Commissioners Gloria Cabral, Jean Cotter-Fox, Cyndi Marland, Dianna Williams, and Eunice Soyun Yang partnered with women from The Women's Fund of Southeastern Massachusetts, YWCA of Southeastern Massachusetts, Dartmouth Community Television, Our Sister's School, and Global Learning Charter School to advocate for several bills identified by the MCSW that directly pertain to equal pay, medical and healthcare, equal rights, the establishment of two additional regional commissions and other bills that are important to the community. This collaboration brought over 60 citizens to Boston for Advocacy Day – by far the largest gathering from the region every before assembled. For next year, BCCSW intends to expand its outreach to additional schools and organizations.

A brief report was given to the MCSW on the collaboration of BCCSW and local groups for Advocacy Day. The MCSW also gave recognition to the BCCSW on their excellent Annual Report.

Commissioner Anne Dziura applied for a mini-grant to the United Way for the Commission to receive funding for brochures and movie rental. The Commission was granted funding for these projects. Thank you, Anne.

Commissioner Cyndi Marland along with the Dartmouth Community Television has worked on a video that depicts Our Sister's School, the bus ride to Advocacy Day, and actual Advocacy Day activities. The video will be broadcast on local cable. The City of New Bedford and the City of Fall River have expressed a desire to air the video on their local cable access stations as well.

Issues identified to date include: (* top five - these priorities have not changed)

- *Education
- *Healthcare
- *Childcare
- *Sexual Abuse/Assault
- *Transportation

Disabilities and women

Language Barriers



Pay equity
Prison Reform/Re-entry
Legislative Support of Women's Issues (e.g., DTA policies)
Single women's eligibility for services
Substance Abuse
Wage Study
Domestic Violence
Bullying
Women Veterans
Internet Safety
Homelessness for women and families

Goals for 2015-2016:

Expand Domestic Violence education effort.

Increase utilization of the media to raise awareness of the Commission.

Maintain regular contact with legislators on issues germane to the Commission's identified priority areas

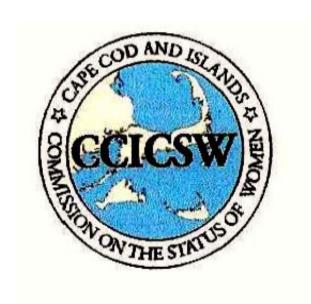
Continue joint meetings/events with the Cape and Islands Commission

Expand and diversity BCCSW's membership

Identify strategies to connect with the region's girls.

Expand collaborative efforts to reach more women and benefit from the expertise of other organizations that support women and girls, either f inancially or through public awareness and programming.

Submitted by: Gloria Cabral and Jean Fox, Vice Chairs BCCSW and BCCSW Commissioners



Cape Cod and Islands Commission on the Status of Women

The mission of the Cape Cod and Islands
Commission on the Status of Women is to provide a
permanent and effective voice for women across
Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket Counties that
facilitates and fosters community and inclusiveness

among women. The Commission stands for fundamental freedoms, basic human rights and the full enjoyment of life for all women throughout their lives.

ANNUAL REPORT

2014

The Cape Cod and Islands Commission on the Status of Women (CCICSW) Commission kicked off the year with a planning retreat designed to formulate goals and direct and guide our coming year. We quickly recognized what our key goal for 2014 should be: recruitment. We were low on Commissioners due to job changes and life circumstances including a few resignations that reduced our ranks. And to this end, we developed an outreach network to attract, recruit and retain new members.

But we still found time to focus on our work!

The CCICSW met no fewer than seven times during 2014 at various locations across Cape Cod on the Upper, Mid and Lower Cape.

We began earnest public work in the winter, and in February 2014, the CCICSW sponsored and hosted a **Legislators' Workshop** in the Town of Sandwich in which state lawmakers representing our region outlined what their goals were, and listened to what our suggestions were. We found this private exchange—not open to the public—a valuable way to verbally exchange goals, concerns and ideas that laid the groundwork for future dialogues. We felt the legislators felt the same way, and this 'grew' our relationships with our Beacon Hill representatives. Issues discussed included equal pay, health insurance for low-income women, childcare and housing concerns, including rental rates on the Lower Cape.

Through spring, various commissioners continued outreach efforts to each Cape Cod town through attending women-centric events and being an active presence in the community. Commissioners also collected data on women in leadership positions for a burgeoning database, as well as health resources available to women throughout the Cape and Islands.

Chair Pam Pollock, Vice Chair Theresa Barbo and Clerk Arlene Kirsch attended the 2014 Advocacy Day in May 2014, sponsored by the Mass. Commission on the Status of Women.

On November 10, 2014, the CCICSW hosted a **joint meeting** with the Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women at Massachusetts Maritime Academy. 'Sharing Our Successes and Challenges' was one of many topics on the agenda.

We ended the year with a private 'thank you' reception for retiring State Representative Cleon Turner (D-Dennis) at the home of Commissioner Theresa Barbo. What was truly remarkable was the turnout for this event. Representatives from police and fire departments from Barnstable, Yarmouth, Dennis and Brewster showed up, as did other lawmakers, decision makers and elected officials.

In a speech, outgoing Chair Pam Pollock was able to directly connect with an audience of about 40 individuals who seemed very interested in the work of the Commission. The event solidified many of the new friendships with legislators that began at the Legislators' Workshop in February.

We are pleased to report that the CCICSW met its recruitment goals in 2014 with a handful of new Commissioners who came aboard at the end of 2014. We are now at a full complement in our roster.

Respectfully submitted,

Theresa M. Barbo, Chair

Commissioners: Theresa M. Barbo, Chair; Claudia Borden; Alice "Bo" Bowen; Helen Bresnahan; Beverly Costa-Ciavola; Linell Grundman; Janet Swain Joakim; Arlene Kirsch, Clerk; Pamela Pollock, Vice Chair; Elizabeth "Betsy" Smith; Deborah Thompson; Marie Younger-Blackburn; Elisa Zawadzkas.



ESSEX COUNTY COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN ANNUAL REPORT 2015

Mission

The Essex County Commission on the Status of Women was formed in 2010 with a mission to study, review and report on the status of women in Essex County, and to provide a permanent, effective voice to advance the status of these women to full equality in all areas of life.

Commissioners

Polly Titcomb, (Co-Chair), Anne Roulet Ferguson, (Co-Chair), Linda Anderson-Mercier, Scottie Robinson, Vilma Lora, Rebecca Hallowell, Jeni Wheeler, Paula Gomez Stordy

Goals & Accomplishments

This year brought new leadership to the Commission. The main goal and accomplishment of the Commission this year was the successful recruitment and appointment of two new Commissioners, Jeni Wheeler and Paula Gomez Stordy. We are anticipating a third appointment in the coming months, which will fill all the seats of the Commission for the first time in years.

Findings

March 25, 2015 Joint Hearing MCSW & ECCSW at YWCA Haverhill, MA

This hearing was well attended by local women as well as social services agency members representing Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen, Andover and other cities and towns in Essex County. Several important issues were passionately presented, some of which we heard about for the first time. Findings include the following:

- There is a huge need for available, affordable, and quality health care services to Spanish speaking populations. Language barriers and lack of understanding of the complex health care system impacts their ability to successfully enroll/reenroll in health insurance programs and fully access appropriate health care. The lack of Spanish speaking, culturally sensitive health care providers, as well as of certified interpreters, continues to be problematic.
- Elderly women are victims of elder abuse by overpowering or controlling spouses, partners, caregivers, children and/or friends.
- Domestic Violence and Sexual assaults: The state has been working on victims'
 protective rights and the importance of advocacy for all in courts, under the new
 Chapter 260. It is clear that additional and ongoing training of law enforcement
 and the judicial system is needed to ensure victims' safety remains paramount,
 particularly those who are most vulnerable, such as immigrants/refugees.

Language translation/interpreting is a continuing problem. Statistics cited by Jeannie Geiger Crisis Center state that it still takes 5-7 attempts for a woman to leave a domestic violence situation. Financial dependence is the leading reason women stay in abusive relationships.

- Latina women are not encouraged toward continued education and advanced placement in high schools. They assume they will continue in vocations that are "appropriate" for ESL, including housekeeping, nursing, hairdressing, and other blue-collar work. Lack of proficiency in speaking English is a huge deterrent to pursuing continued education for Latinas.
- Successful Latina women claim their success was the result of mentoring from their community or church. More ESL support & mentors are needed.
- Heroin addiction is a huge problem in Essex County (and on the NH border); its
 effects on women and their families is greatest. Women are frequently the single
 head of households, so if they die of a heroin overdose, or are unable to take care
 of their families, it affects their children, parents, grandparents. More support is
 needed to care for the families displaced by heroin, even across state borders.
 More treatment programs are needed.

Other Statistics

- 52 % of residents are women
- Almost 18 % of Essex County is Hispanic or Latino
- 1 out of 8 women & girls in Essex County lives in poverty
- A single woman heads 1 in 5 families
- Over 60% of all families living in poverty depend on a single woman as the head of the household

Conclusion

Essex County is a diverse county that covers 34 cities and towns. The testimony we hear in Essex County reinforces the importance of supporting women. We need more health care availability, Spanish language and mentoring support for ESL populations, and support for elderly and single parents. Finally, we need to continue to fight against sexual abuse, domestic violence, and heroin addiction, and provide adequate treatment and support for the affected individuals and families.

Goals for 2015-2016

- Develop annual calendar of events, including at least one forum where testimony is obtained from local women
- Continue advocating to our elected officials to support legislation affecting women, including the MCSW's legislative priorities
- Facilitate more and continued collaboration and communication with the MCSW
- · Facilitate more and continued collaboration with other regional Commissions
- Inform leaders of business, education, healthcare, municipalities and communications media on issues pertaining to women in Essex County
- Continue to study and report on the status of women in Essex County



MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women

Annual Report

June 8, 2015

MetroWest Commissioners	Current Office Held	Term (in Years) as of 1/1/2015
Ashton, Cathy		3
Filipe, Leonor	Secretary	2
Hohl, Patricia	Director, Legislative Committee	1
Love, Kelly		2
Maseda, Jen	Director, Programming & Communications	3
Reynolds-Alpert, Suzanne		1
Rosenblum, Nancy	Vice-Chair	1
Schultz, Denise	Chair	2
Wightman, Heather		3

The MetroWest Commission originated on January 14, 2015 when the nine nominated Commissioners were sworn in by Framingham District Court First Justice, David Cunis at a ceremony at Framingham State University. Directly following the ceremony, the nine of us met, many for the first time, to conduct our initial business meeting. Since then, the MetroWest Commission on the Status of Women ("MWCSW") has met on a monthly basis. We also participated in a goal setting retreat where we got to know each other a bit better, prioritized our goals and strategized over the issues that we want to focus on in the coming months.



During our February and March 2015 meetings we established our by-laws and elected officers (see membership list above.) Patricia Hohl, our Legislative Committee Director, has been active on the monthly legislative calls held by the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women ("MCSW,") helping our Commissioners better understand who the Legislators are in our region, along with the bills they have sponsored. Patricia also highlights bills we may want to further endorse and support. For example, we have joined the Equal Pay Coalition and participated in related conference calls held to date. This work is ongoing and

informative to the Commissioners, and we hope to meet with the Legislators in our region in the coming months.

Jen Maseda and Suzanne Reynolds-Alpert are on the Programming and Communications Committee and have been working on our logo, Facebook page and other communications. We will be addressing ways

to further leverage and build on this work in the coming months.



On April 14, 2015, we held an "Equal Pay Day" event at Framingham State University. Many of the Commissioners attended this event designed to raise awareness of the wage gap that women experience in a variety of demographics. The commissioners handed out over 120 cookies with a 23% "bite" taken out of them to represent that, according to National statistics, women earn \$.77 on each dollar earned by a male in a like position. The event was a success and we plan to do this again (with more cookies!) next year.

On April 30, 2015, several of the Commissioners attended the joint hearing of the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women ("MCSW") and the

Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women held at the Attleboro Public Library. In addition, one of our Commissioners attended the hearing at the YWCA in Lawrence. Attending both of these meetings gave us a better understanding of what happens during a hearing and how to plan an effective hearing in MetroWest in 2015.

The Commissioners also attended Advocacy Day at the State House on May 14, 2015. Denise Schultz, Chair, gave remarks and updates on MWCSW's progress to date during the morning program. Many of our Commissioners assisted those attending in learning how to navigate the state house. It was an enjoyable and successful day.



Beginning in May, the focus of our monthly meetings has been on educating and informing ourselves on the issues that affect women in the MetroWest region. We have taken the position that educating ourselves is our first order of business. To that end, we are inviting various subject matter experts to meet with us and present their data and experience so we can be more effective advocates. Our May speaker represented a local nonprofit organization established to support adult women who have experienced sexual slavery, commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Our June speaker

is the Superintendent of the Massachusetts Correction Institution ("MCI") Framingham. She will inform on issues relative to incarcerated women. Over the coming months we will invite other speakers from a variety of non-projects and other agencies from a list we are actively developing. We expect that this process will help us focus our outreach efforts and allow us to develop effective ways to keep the community informed and engaged in our work.

Our goal as a Commission, beyond our mission statement as defined in our by-laws, is to strengthen our ability to advocate on behalf of MetroWest women. We seek to do this by listening, learning and informing ourselves about the issues that matter to the majority of women in our region, determining effective outreach strategies and developing a robust list of stakeholders. These efforts are intended to improve our ability to play a role in the support and advancement of women and the promotion of their rights and opportunities.



Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women Annual Report June 15th, 2015

Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women ~ Members

Chantel Bethea ~ Worcester
Cathleen Liberty ~ Worcester
Margaret Guzman ~ Worcester
Suzanne Lewandowski ~ North Brookfield
Amanda Penza ~ Uxbridge
Amy Ebbeson ~ Rutland
Judith Ockene ~ Harvard
Randi Zanca ~Northbridge
Sheila Simon-Aleman ~ Fitchburg

The following were nominated and elected as officers:

Chantel Bethea ~ Chair Margaret Guzman ~ Vice Chair Amanda Penza ~ Secretary (note taker)

Accomplishments 2014 - 2015

Membership:

We had one member step down due to personal reasons. We have now filled that position with Cathleen Liberty of Worcester she comes with a background in public health and community health.

Hearings/Public Forums:

The Worcester County CSW collaborated with the Mass CSW to have a public hearing in Southbridge on February 26th, 2015. The hearing was very well attended and the feedback was amazing.

April 27th, 2015: Pam Torres of Childcare Resources attended the public forum at the YWCA of Central Mass.



Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women

Additional Activities:

Regular monthly meetings with different public officials were had to get a better understanding of what concerns were being met, such Senator Michael Moore, Senator Chandler, Mayor Wong of Fitchburg, State Rep Mary Keefe and many other's. Worcester County CSW has focused on working to gather all resources through out Worcester County, we are putting together a resource guide that will give women access at their finger tips, we are also including different groups that work on different platforms for women to get involved in their community and abroad, by gathering all of this information it has helped the commission to learn who we can collaborate with in the county.

Worcester County CSW is working to gather as much information from our officials so that we can have public forums to gather more information from our county. We held our first public in April and had Pam Torres come out and give information in regards to childcare because that was one of the most common threads in speaking with officials and women in our community. While Pam was giving out information she was also answering questions so that our women could fully understand the process of obtaining a voucher and also the pricing of childcare. Pam left a lot of information and is willing to conduct these talks in different parts of Worcester County, which the commission is going to be doing in the fall.

Worcester County CSW participated in a panel discussion with Investing in Girls May 29th in Sturbridge, MA.

Worcester County CSW participated in a panel discussion with the Mass CSW for Advocacy Day May $14^{
m th}$ on Beacon Hill.

Issues identified:

1. Mental health

- a. Health care (navigation) (appeal process)
- b. Teen suicide
- c. Domestic health

Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women

- d. Cultural understanding
- Substance abuse
 - a. Food disorders
 - b. Self-esteem
 - c. Cultural understanding
 - d. Teen suicide
- 3. Domestic violence
 - a. Sexual abuse
 - b. Rape
 - c. Cultural understanding
- 4. Economics for women
 - a. Jobs
 - b. Financial literacy
 - c. Childcare
 - d. Child hunger WIC
 - e. Immigrant women
- Education (pre-k through college)
 - Stem pipeline
 - b. Head-start



Worcester County Commission on the Status of Women

- c. Teen pregnancy
- 6. Seniors
- 7. Veterans

Goals for 2015-2016

Have six more forums before the end of 2015 in regards to childcare across Worcester County.

Collaborate with the Mass CSW to hold more public hearings.

Maintain regular contact with our legislators and officials on issues that concern women that have been identified as our priority areas of focus.

Collaborate with the MetroWest CSW.

Continue to reach out to other organizations to reach more women and girls to give support through public awareness.

Attend community events with literature about the commission.

Submitted by: Chantel Bethea, Chair of the Worcester County CSW